THE EIGHT-OARED VICTORS

LESTER CHADWICK

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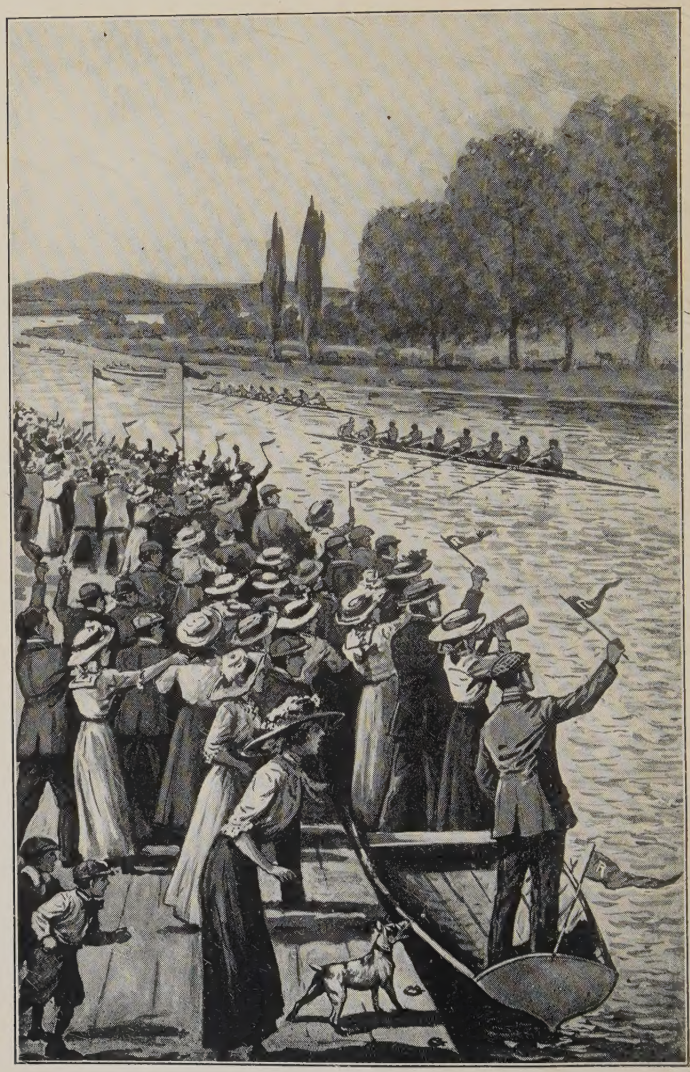

THE FINISH LINE WAS BUT A HUNDRED FEET AWAY.

THE EIGHT-OARED VICTORS

A Story of College Water Sports

BY

LESTER CHADWICK

AUTHOR OF "THE RIVAL PITCHERS," "A QUARTER-BACK'S PLUCK," "THE WINNING TOUCHDOWN," "BASEBALL JOE OF THE SILVER STARS," "BASEBALL JOE AT YALE," ETC.

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BOOKS BY LESTER CHADWICK

THE COLLEGE SPORTS SERIES

12mo. Cloth. Illustrated.

THE RIVAL PITCHERS
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THE WINNING TOUCHDOWN
FOR THE HONOR OF RANDALL
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(Other volumes in preparation)

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THE EIGHT-OARED VICTORS

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THE EIGHT-OARED VICTORS

CHAPTER I

GREAT NEWS

"And after this—the deluge, I suppose," quoted Tom Parsons as he gazed moodily out of the window of his study, and watched the raindrops splashing on the ledge, running down the pipe, and forming one of many streams that trickled over the green college campus. "Is it never going to stop?" he went on, turning toward his three chums. "It's rained now——"

"Oh, for the love of differential calculus!" cried Phil Clinton, "can't you talk of anything but the weather, Tom? I'm sick of hearing it discussed."

"No sicker than I am of hearing it pour," retorted the first speaker.

"The rain certainly does seem to stick around," added Sid Henderson, as he endeavored to arise from a decrepit armchair—one of the twins—that added comfort to the college study. "I'm so damp, and altogether gluey, that it's all I can do

to get up. Lend me a hand somebody!" he appealed.

"'Friends, Romans, Countrymen, lend me your ears!'" recited Tom in the best schoolboy style. "Can't you manage to assist yourself, Sid; or are you getting too fat?"

"Fat! Huh! I guess if you'd trained the way I did for those track games you wouldn't be fat!" was shot out in protest.

"Train! Listen to him, Phil. Just because he won his big jump he thinks that's all there is. Why——"

"Hold on," put in Phil, quietly. "You fellows will get on each other's nerves if you continue. And you're certainly getting on mine. How do you expect me to bone away if you're going on like this? That fussy alarm clock is bad enough—I don't know why we tolerate the old thing anyhow—but when you two get to scrapping, and this confounded rain never lets up, why it's the extreme edge, so to speak."

"It is the rain, I guess," spoke Tom Parsons, in a low voice. "It's enough to get on anyone's nerves. A straight week now," and he drummed on the wet window-pane, while Phil turned over on an old sofa, that creaked dismally, and tried to get a better light on his book. But the gloom outside seemed to have found a place in the study room.

"Easy on that ancient and honorable piece of furniture!" cautioned Tom, as he looked anxiously at the sofa, which seemed to groan in protest at Phil's weight. "It won't stand much more mending, and that's no idle dream."

"Don't worry," said Phil, easily. "I think as much of this sofa as any of you."

"Um!" grunted Tom moodily, as he crossed over to the other armchair and threw himself into it at no small risk of going through the seat. "What's a fellow to do?" he asked.

Neither of his chums answered him. Sid had managed to rise without anyone's aid, and was examining a pile of books, as though trying to pick out the one containing the easiest lessons.

"Where's Frank?" asked Tom, after a silence.

"I saw the Big Californian crossing the campus awhile ago," replied Phil, closing his book and yawning. "He was bundled up in a raincoat, and seemed as chipper as a clam at high tide."

"Wish I had the spunk to go out," commented Sid. "The river must be nearly flood-high by this time, with all the water that's fallen."

"Water! Ugh! Don't mention it," begged Tom.

Silence reigned in the room, broken only by the ticking of the fussy little alarm clock. There was the rustle of the pages, as the two lads, studying, turned to various lessons. Tom got up with

an impatient exclamation, and passed into one of the four small bedrooms that opened out of the main study.

"I think I'll take a chance and go out!" he announced. "It's as dull as ditchwater in here. You fellows are about as cheerful as a wake."

"Um!" grunted Phil. Sid did not take the trouble to reply.

"That's right. Be grumpy!" said Tom, sarcastically.

Clearly the weather was getting on the nerves of all of them. And small wonder, for it had rained almost steadily for a week, and the stone piles that made up Randall College seemed soaked through to the very wall paper. The campus was like a sponge, and the walks, where they were not gravel, were ribbons of mud.

"Lucky we got our Spring games over with, before this flood set in," went on Tom.

There was no answer.

"What's the matter; have you fellows lost your tongues?" he demanded, sharply.

He paused in the act of slipping off a lounging coat preparatory to putting on an outdoor garment. Sid and Phil avoided his glance. At that moment the door into the hall opened and there stepped into the study a big lad, attired in a raincoat, that dripped moisture at every seam.

"Hello, Duck!" greeted Sid with a cheerful grin.

"Where have you been, Frank?" asked Tom. "I was just coming out to join you."

Evidently this was Frank Simpson, the "Big Californian," the reason for the nickname being obvious.

"Come ahead—all of you," invited Frank. "It isn't so bad, and I guess it's going to clear up."

"I believe you're right!" agreed Tom, and there was an instant change in his voice. "It has almost stopped. Come on!" he cried. "You fellows stop boning, and we'll make a party of it. It's early yet, only the clouds make it seem dark."

"Wait a minute," suggested Frank, as he saw that the others were likely to fall in with Tom's idea. "Have you fellows heard the news?"

"Has Moses granted a Roman holiday?" asked Sid.

"Or has Pitchfork consented to resign?" added Phil.

"Neither one. This is the greatest news ever. And it's just the kind of a day to impart it, for it has to do with water. Fellows, do you think Randall could get into the rowing game—I mean as it ought to be gotten into? Do you think we could make up a crew—or two crews for that matter—an eight and four—that could put it all over Boxer Hall and Fairview Academy? Do you think

we could turn out some four-and-eight-oared victors?"

Frank paused in his enthusiastic questions, and gazed at his chums through a mist of moisture that seemed to emanate from his damp person.

"Do you?" he repeated, for they were silent.

"What does he mean?" asked Tom.

"He speaketh in riddles," added Phil.

"Mayhap he but jesteth," came from Sid.

"No joke at all," said Frank with a smiling good nature. "This is the very latest news, and I think I'm one of the first fellows to hear it. Listen and I will a tale unfold."

"Well, as long as it's only a tale you're going to unfold, and not that wet raincoat, proceed, most noble Brutus," begged Tom.

"Oh, let up with the jollying, and let's hear the news," suggested Phil.

"In brief, then, it's this," went on Frank. "A number of old grads, who, it seems, used to be fonder of rowing and sculling than anything else when they were at Randall, have had a meeting, and they decided to subscribe ten thousand dollars to fit us up with a dandy boathouse and shells—that is if we'll consent to accept——"

"Accept! I guess yes, with running shoes on!" cried Phil.

"There's a sort of a string attached to it," went on Frank.

"What is it? Do we have to raise an additional ten thousand dollars?" asked Tom, suspiciously.

"No, nothing as hard as that. But we have to form a regular rowing association, and promise to work our level best to be the champions of the river and lake. Shall we do it?"

For a moment there was silence. And then Tom cried:

"Of course we will!"

"Why shouldn't we?" demanded Phil.

"Say, this is great!" came from Sid. "Randall going to have a crew at last! It's about time. But I say," he went on, "it's too late this term to think of it. Why we only have a few more weeks before the Summer vacation."

"I know it," replied Frank, "and the idea is to get things in shape the remainder of this term, and have a regatta early in the Fall, before the football season opens. I think we can induce Boxer Hall and Fairview to enter into that sort of agreement, even if those two colleges do row each other every Spring."

"Good idea," commented Tom.

"Say, Frank, how comes it that you know all this?" asked Sid.

"Merely by accident," answered the Big Californian. "I was coming across the campus just now, plowing along through the water with my head down, and I ran plump into Moses and Dr.

Marshall. I begged their pardons, of course, and was about to go on when Moses, looking at the doctor, said:

"'Perhaps we had better tell him, and have him sound some of the others.'"

"I began to pick up my ears at that and wonder what was in the wind. And when Dr. Marshall came back with: 'It wouldn't be a bad idea,' I knew something was up. The upshot of it was that Moses took me into his confidence. Ahem!" and Frank swelled up his chest.

"Go on, you rooster!" commanded Tom.

"Tell us about the crew," begged Sid.

"Well, that's it. Dr. Churchill said he had just received the offer from a number of the wealthy old grads. who, it seems, got together, had a sort of meeting, and voted that the decline of water activity at Randall College was a shame.

"It seems that they used to be regular sharks at rowing in their day, and they passed a resolution that, whereas Randall had done well at baseball, football and in track athletics, nevertheless she was a back number when it came to rowing.

"Therefore, 'be it resolved, and it is hereby resolved,' and all that sort of thing, you know. Then they subscribed the ten thousand dollars, and the only condition is that we promise to do our best to become champions."

"Which we'll do without question," said Tom.

"Of course," added Phil.

"But it's going to take a lot of work," commented Sid. "We'll need all the time between now and Fall to get in shape. But what can we practice in? We haven't any decent shells."

"We can get some second-hand ones for practice," said Frank, "and I understand the old grads will have the new ones ready for us in the Fall, together with the new boathouse. We can also practice during our vacation."

"Good!" cried Tom. "It makes me feel better already. I want to get out on the water right now."

"And a little while ago you thought there was altogether too much water," commented Phil, drily.

"Oh, well," excused Tom, with a shrug of his shoulders. "I say, it is clearing!" he cried. "Come on down and get into a boat. Even one of the old tubs will answer, and we can talk this thing over."

"That's what I came in to propose," said Frank. "As we are among the older students here, it will be sort of up to us to spread the idea. I think everybody will take to it, though."

"It's about time we took a fall out of Boxer Hall on the water," declared Sid. "Fairview isn't in it so much, though she came mighty near beating Boxer in the eight one year."

The rain had ceased, there probably being no more water left in the sky, as Sid remarked. The four chums—the "Inseparables," as they were called, slipped off their lounging jackets—at least Sid and Phil did, for Tom already had done so—and soon all were on their way to Sunny River, on the bank of which the various buildings of Randall College were situated. Over the soggy campus they took their way, meeting no one, for no one else seemed to have the courage to venture out.

Though the institution had not boasted of a rowing association, or crew, in some years, there was a boathouse, and a number of craft owned by the students, and its was toward this structure that our friends betook themselves.

"Let's take the big barge," suggested Tom. "Then we can all get in it and talk."

"It's as heavy as lead," complained Phil. "It will be all right rowing down stream, but coming back we'll have a hard pull."

"What of it?" demanded Frank. "It will be good practice for us if we're going to try for the crew."

"That's right, we will have to make tries to see who are the best oarsmen," remarked Tom. "I wonder if Mr. Lighton is a good coach when it comes to rowing? I know he's all right at football and baseball, but——"

"I believe Dr. Churchill mentioned that if we took up this offer, one of the old grads, who was a crackerjack oarsman in his day, might come and give us some pointers," put in Frank.

"Well, let's get out. Say, but the river is high, though," Tom exclaimed, as they came in sight of the stream. The rain of the past week had raised it considerably, and it was now rushing swiftly along, a muddy stream, far from bearing out its name—Sunny.

"The barge is as safe as a ferry-boat," commented Sid. "It can't upset."

"All right, I'm game," declared Tom. "Let's row down to Tonoka Lake, and see what's going on there."

This lake was a large body of water into which the river emptied—in fact it was more like the widening of the stream than a real lake, but a lake it was called in spite of that. In its centre was Crest Island, of good size.

Soon the four students were in the barge, a four-oared craft, with enough seats so that the quartette could row with an oar each, after the manner of those in a shell.

"Take out the rudder," directed Frank. "We'll have to make our own course, for it can't be worked by one's feet as in a four-oared shell."

Phil unshipped the rudder, and they rowed out into the middle of the stream. It was easy going

down with the current, but they realized that it would be harder coming back. However, they were out for practice as much as anything else, and did not mind a stiff pull.

"I wonder what sort of a stroke we pull?" said Tom, as they rowed on.

"Oh, we probably have lots of faults," admitted Frank. "But they can be corre ed."

"It's a pretty big chunk to b e off—to think of beating Boxer Hall, where the fellows have been rowing for years, and we just starting in," commented Sid.

"Oh, stranger things have happened," declared Tom. "We can do it."

Then began a spirited disc ssion of the splendid offer that had been made t Randall, and a talk as to what the other students would think of it. The four chums were enthusiastic over the prospect.

"Say," called Tom, after a bit. "This is all right, and lots of fun, but we ve come down quite a way, and we've got to think of going back. This current is fierce."

"Quitter!" called Phil.

"Nothing of the sort—I've got common-sense," was the retort.

"Tom is right," said Frank Simpson, in a quiet voice. "We mustn't overdo the thing. It is going

to be a stiffish pull back, and we don't want to be late for dinner—I don't anyhow."

They had rowed down to where the river widened into the lake. There was a Summer picnic ground near here, and on the higher slopes of land, back from the water, were a number of fine residences, the estates running down to the shore edge. Many of the places had boathouses.

As the boys came opposite one of these they saw a small motor-boat turn in toward a shelter, the doors of which were open. There was a lone man in the boat, and he skillfully directed her course across the current.

"Let's pull overe there and rest before going back," suggested Sid, and the others agreed. They reached the boathouse and dock in time to see the man in the motor-boat close and lock the door, with his craft inside. Apparently he did not notice the boys, who were working to get in on the downstream side of the float, so they could be out of the current for a little while.

"There," remarked the man from the motor-boat, as he walked out of the shore-door of the house, also locking that after him, "I guess things will be safe in there until I come back. I won't be gone long. Maybe I ought to take them with me but they're heavy, and I've got to go up hill—I guess I'll leave them," and he started up the

slope from the river, toward a fine residence on the hill.

"He must have money in the bank—talking to himself that way," remarked Tom, in a low voice.

"I wonder what it is he's leaving in his boat?" spoke Phil.

"He trusts us, anyhow," laughed Frank.

"He didn't see us," came from Sid. "Anyhow the place is locked."

The boys rested there by the boathouse for several minutes.

Tom was about to propose that they start back, for it looked cloudy again, as if the rain would begin once more. But before he could mention this fact Sid exclaimed:

"Here comes the Boxer Hall shell! Say, look at those fellows row!"

"They are hitting up the pace!" agreed Frank.

All looked to see a fine eight-oared shell fairly scudding over the water under the impulse of the sixteen sturdy arms of the rowers.

"We'll soon be doing that," said Phil, in a low voice. And then some of the lads in the shell looked over and saw our friends.

CHAPTER II

THE FLOOD

"HELLO, you fellows!" called Dave Ogden, who was acting as the coxswain of the shell, waving his megaphone at them. "Out for practice?" and he grinned as he looked at the heavy barge.

"Yes, we're getting ready to order a new shell," answered Tom.

"Ha! Ha! That's pretty good. Maybe you think you can beat us rowing!" and Dave looked not a little proudly at the eight lads whose efforts he had been directing. They had been out for a spin on the lake, and were now coming back rather leisurely.

"We will beat you—some day!" declared Frank.

"Maybe you'd better not tell them about our shell until we get it," suggested Tom, in a low voice.

"Oh, they'll have to know it some time or other," declared Frank. "It will be all over the college in a day or so, and Boxer Hall is sure to learn of it. Besides, I want to get things stirred

up a bit. But they'll only think we're joking, so far."

The eight-oared shell passed on with a sweep, the rowers making good time against the current. But then the craft was so much like a knife that it offered scarcely any resistance to the water.

"Row easy, all!" came the command from Dove Ogden, and the rowers reduced the number of their strokes per minute. They were closer to shore now, and out of the worst grip of the current. The coxswain waved his megaphone at our friends in a friendly fashion, and then gave his attention to his crew. Though there was rivalry —sometimes bitter—between Randall and Boxer Hall, the students were, for the most part, very friendly.

"Jove! It will be great to get in that game!" exclaimed Tom with a sigh, as he watched the rival's shell.

"And we'll do it, too!" declared Frank, earnestly.

"Well, let's be getting back," suggested Sid; and the others agreed that this might be a wise thing to do.

And while they are returning to college I will, in order that my new readers may have a better understanding of the characters, tell something of the books that precede this in the "College Sports Series."

Our first volume was called "The Rival Pitchers," and told how Tom Parsons, then a raw country lad, came to Randall College, with the idea of getting on the baseball nine. He succeeded, but it was only after a hard struggle and bitter rivalry. Tom made good against heavy odds. The second volume had to deal with college football, under the title, "A Quarter-back's Pluck," and in that I related how Phil Clinton, under trying circumstances, won the championship gridiron battle for his eleven.

"Batting to Win," the third book of the series, was, as the title indicates, a baseball story. Besides the accounts of the diamond contests, there was related the manner in which was solved a queer mystery surrounding Sid Henderson. Going back to football interests, in the fourth book, "The Winning Touchdown," there will be found many accounts of pigskin matters. Also how Tom Parsons, and his chums, saved the college from ruin in a strange manner.

The book immediately preceding this volume was "For the Honor of Randall," and while it was, in the main, a story of various college athletics, there is detailed how a certain charge, involving the honor of Frank Simpson, and incidentally his college, was disproved.

My old readers know much about Randall, but I might mention, for the benefit of my new friends,

that the college was located on the outskirts of the town of Haddonfield, in the middle west. Near the intsitution ran Sunny River, as I have said, and it was on this stream, and the connecting lake, that it was proposed to have Randall enter into aquatic sports. Randall, Boxer Hall and Fairview Institute—the latter a co-educational college— had formed the Tonoka Lake League in athletics, though in rowing only the two latter colleges had competed. But this was soon to be changed.

At the head of Randall was Dr. Albertus Churchill, dubbed Moses, in affectionate terms. Dr. Emerson Tines, alias "Pitchfork," was head Latin instructor, and Mr. Andrew Zane was proctor. Dr. Marshall was a physician in residence, and also gave instruction in various lines.

Tom, Phil, Sid and Frank roomed together. Formerly they had had a large single dormitory to themselves, doing their studying there, and going from there to classes, lectures or chapel—but not the latter when it could conveniently be "cut." In the book just before this I told of the Spring track games in which Randall had managed to come out the victor. These had been past a week or two when the present story opens.

Just after the games there had been thrown open to the use of the students a new dormitory, and study-building, with rooms arranged *en suite,* and the four chums had taken a large central apart-

ment, with bedrooms opening from it. This gave them a much more convenient place than formerly.

But, if they changed their room, they did not change the furniture—at least they kept all the old, though getting some new. Among the former, were the two ancient armchairs, known to my readers, and the decrepit sofa, which had been mended until it seemed that nothing of the original was there. And then there was the alarm clock, which served to awaken the lads—that is, when they did not stop it from ticking by jabbing a toothpick somewhere up in the interior mechanism.

As for the friends of our heroes they were many, and their enemies few. You will meet them, old as well as new, as the story progresses.

"There sure is some water!" exclaimed Tom, as he gazed from shore to shore of the turbulent stream.

"And it's getting higher," added Phil.

"And going to rain more," came from Sid.

"Oh, there'll be a flood sure, if you calamity-howlers have your way," remarked Frank. "Give way there! What are you doing, Phil—stalling on me?"

"Say, who made you the coxswain, anyhow?" demanded the aggrieved one.

The boys reached Randall just as the downpour began again, but their spirits had been raised by the row, and by the good news which Frank had

heard. It was confirmed a little later by an announcement on the bulletin board, calling for a meeting of the athletic committee, within a few days, to consider the matter.

"Say, this is going to be great!" cried Holly Cross, one of the football squad. "Rowing is something Randall always needed."

"And she needs rowers, too, don't forget that, Holly, me lad!" exclaimed Bricktop Molloy, a genial Irish lad who was taking a post-graduate course, after an absence of some time at Columbia and with a mining concern. Some said he came back to Randall merely because he loved her athletics so, but Bricktop, with a ruffling up of his red hair would say, half-savagely:

"I deny the allegation, sir, and I defy the alligator!" an old joke but a good one.

"Oh, we'll get the rowers," was the confident declaration of many, and then the lads, gathering in the gymnasium, or in the rooms of one and another, talked over the coming rowing contests.

It rained all night, and part of the next day, and then seemed to clear off for good.

"What about another spin on the river?" asked Tom, after his last lecture. "I'm ready for it."

"So am I," declared Sid, and the remaining two fell into line. Several other lads agreed to accompany the four inseparables, and soon quite a group was headed for the river.

"Say, look at that; would you!" cried Phil, as they came in sight of the stream. "That's a flood all right!"

"I should say so!" remarked Tom. "Why, it's almost up to the doors of the boathouse, and it hasn't been that high in years!"

"Some water," agreed Frank. "I wonder if it's safe to go out? Look at that current!"

"Safe! Of course it's safe!" exclaimed Phil. "I've seen it worse."

"But not with so much wreckage in the river," added Tom. "Look at those big logs. If one of them even hit the barge it would smash a hole in it."

"There's part of a chicken-coop!" cried Sid, pointing to the object floating down the river.

"Yes, and there's half a cow-shed, if I'm any judge," went on Frank.

"The river sure is high," conceded Phil. "I did want to take a run down to Fairview, and see Sis, but——"

"See your sister!" jeered Sid. "I know who you want to see down there all right," for while Phil's sister, Ruth, attended the co-educational institution, so did Madge Tyler, of whom Phil was very fond, and also Mabel Harrison, in whom Sid was more than ordinarily interested. Besides, there were "others."

"I was going to row down," declared Phil, stoutly. "But I can go by trolley."

"Oh, let's try a little row," suggested Tom. "If we find the current is too strong, we can come back and take a car. I'd like to see the girls."

"Brave youth! To admit that!" exclaimed Frank. "I fancy we all would. Well, let's get out the boat."

But they found the flood too much for them. Venturing only a little way out from shore they were gripped in the current with such force that they saw it would be folly to proceed. Accordingly, they put back, as did their companions in other boats.

As they were tying up at the boathouse, Wallops, one of the college messengers, came in.

"Did you hear about it?" he demanded, apparently much excited.

"About what?" he was asked.

"A lot of boathouses down the river have been washed away in the flood," he went on. "The small one at Boxer Hall came near going, but they anchored it with ropes. One of their small shells was smashed. Oh, it's a bad flood all right!"

"Well, we can't help it," said Tom. "I guess the trolley cars are still running. Come on, fellows, if we're going to Fairview Institute."

So, leaving the boathouse, they started for the trolley line.

"We'll take a row down the river to-morrow, and see what damage the flood did," called Sid to Wallops, as they moved away. They little realized what they would find, or what part it would play in the history of Randall.

CHAPTER III

THE MISSING TROPHIES

"Boys, you really must go!"

"Oh, can't we stay just a bit longer?"

"No, not another minute. Miss Philock has sent up twice to say that you've stayed long enough."

"I think her clock is wrong."

"We haven't been here ten minutes."

"Oh, Sid Henderson! Why, it's over half an hour!" exclaimed Mabel Harrison.

"And he's the fellow who didn't use to like the girls!" said Tom, with conviction. "Oh, Rome, how art thou fallen!"

"Cut it out!" growled Sid, under his breath.

The four chums had called on their friends and Phil's sister at Fairview Institute, and the result can easily be imagined by the foregoing conversation. There had been jolly talk, a telling of the new chance that had unexpectedly come to Randall, and then the appeal of the girls that the boys must go—not because the girls wanted them to—

but because Miss Philock, the head of the co-educational institution, deemed it necessary.

"But we can come again; can't we?" asked Frank, as they paused at the door. Somewhere down the corridor a thin lady, with thin lips, was narrowly watching the group of young people.

"Sure we can come again!" declared Phil. "They can't stop me from seeing my sister."

"Or someone else's" put in Tom, mischievously.

"Tom! Stop it!" cried Madge Tyler. "She'll hear you."

"But we will come!" declared Frank.

"I don't see how we poor girls can prevent you," said Helen Newton, with a mischievous glance of her eyes.

"Young ladies!" came a warning voice from down the corridor.

"Oh, you really must go!" exclaimed Ruth Clinton.

"All right," agreed Tom. "We'll be back soon. When is the next dance?"

"We'll send you cards," replied Madge Tyler. "Good-bye!"

And the boys moved off, with many backward glances, while the girls lingered in the doorway of the reception hall until Miss Philock advanced to garner them into her charge.

"Young ladies!" she began severely, "if your friends overstay their time again I shall not per-

mit them to see you—even if they are *brothers!*" and she looked at Ruth.

"Horrid thing!" murmured Madge. "I'll be glad when vacation comes."

"Are your folks going to camp on Crest Island again?" asked Ruth, naming the resort in Tonoka Lake.

"I think so. Papa sent a man up to look over the cottage this week, to see if it needed any repairs. And, girls, if we do go, I want you all to spend several weeks with me!" cried Madge Tyler. "We will have a scrumtious time!"

When the boys got back to Randall they found some mild excitement there. Further word had come from the committee of old graduates that they had perfected their arrangements in the matter of supplying Randall with all that was necessary to enter into aquatic sports, and there was a request that the students at once hold a meeting, and decide whether or not they would accept the offer.

Of course it is not necessary to say that the boys did accept. A meeting was called for that same evening, and it was enthusiastically voted to accept the generous offer, with thanks. It was voted to have an eight-oared crew, as well as a four, while as many singles as could be arranged, with possibly a double. A committee was appointed to secure some second-hand shells for prac-

tice, pending the arrival of the new ones in the Fall.

Another committee was named to negotiate with Boxer Hall and Fairview Institute, looking to planning for the races in the Fall.

"If they won't meet us then, we'll have to wait until next Spring," said Frank Simpson.

"Oh, I guess they're sports enough to give us a race this Fall," declared Tom. "We'll try, anyhow."

It was now June and the weather, after the long rain, was perfect. Within a few days Boxer Hall and Fairview would meet in their annual water carnival, swimming as well as boat races, and, as some of the Randall boys had entered in the swimming contests, it was planned to send a big delegation from that college to the meet.

"We can get a line on their rowing that way," said Sid, and the others agreed with him.

Meanwhile the flooded river was subsiding, and a few days after their visit to the girls, our four friends went out for a row again. In the meanwhile they had secured some books on the subject of sculling, and, as they went down stream, they endeavored to correct their faults.

But, as is always the case when you try to do something opposite to the way you have learned it, whether that way be good or bad, there was trouble.

"I can't row for a cent the way the book says it ought to be done," declared Tom.

"Me either," came from Sid.

"And yet that's the right way," said Frank. "I guess we'll get on to it after a bit. But let's row our old way now, and go down to Crest Island. That will make a good distance, and test our wind. Later we can row right. Anyhow, if we have a coach he'll show us the ropes. Give way now, everybody!"

They made good speed, and, a little later, were nearing the island, the largest one of three or four that dotted the lake. Crest Island was the home of several cottagers in Summer.

"Look! What's that!" cried Tom, as they neared the upper point of the bit of water-surrounded land.

"Looks like a boat wrecked there!" said Phil.

"It is," declared Sid. "It's smashed on the rocks."

"Let's take a look," suggested Frank. "Maybe it's worth saving."

"It's a motor-boat," said Tom, as they came nearer. "But I guess there isn't much left of it."

"And there's part of the boathouse it was evidently in," came from Phil. "Probably it was carried away by the flood—boat, boathouse and all, and smashed on these rocks."

By this time they had brought their boat to the

"DID YOU BOYS TAKE ANYTHING FROM MY BOAT?" ASKED THE MAN.

island shore, and, getting out, they examined the wreck. Truly it had been a bad smash. The hull itself could never be used again, and it was a question whether the engine could, as one of the cylinders was badly cracked. The seat lockers had been broken open, and nothing seemed to remain in them.

"Say, this is the same boat that fellow locked in the boathouse, the time we were out rowing when we met the Boxer Hall shell!" cried Tom, as he saw the name on the bow.

"That's right!" agreed Frank. "The very same. Wallops said some boathouses had been carried away. This must have been one of them."

"I wonder who owns this boat?" ventured Sid, but no one answered him.

They looked at the wreck for some little time longer, and then started back up the river. They had not gone far from the island before they met a man rowing down in a small boat. He had an anxious look on his face as he hailed them.

"I say, boys," he called, "have you seen anything of a wrecked motor-boat about here?"

"There's one down on the point of that island," said Tom. "The *Sylph*."

"That's mine!" exclaimed the man. "Is there anything left of her?"

"Not much," replied Frank. "Wait, we'll

show you where she is. We were just looking at her."

"You were?" exclaimed the man, and there was something in the sharp way he said it, and in his tone, that caused the boys to glance at him curiously.

"Yes, saw it by accident," went on Phil.

"Did you—er—find—that is—Oh, never mind, I can soon tell when I look at her," the man said, rather confusedly, as he rowed on. The four lads turned their craft and accompanied him.

"There she is!" cried Frank, pointing out the wrecked craft amid some rocks and bushes. "You can see for yourself there's not much left of her."

Without a word the man sprang ashore from his boat, while the college lads kept their craft off the rocks. Rapidly rummaging through the broken-open lockers, the man, muttering to himself, suddenly stood up. As he did so, Tom said in a low voice:

"That's the same chap who locked the boat up. I wonder what is missing?"

"Did you—excuse me for asking—but did you boys take anything from my boat?" asked the man, in rather hard tones.

"Take anything? What do you mean?" demanded Sid, sharply.

"Something is missing from one of the lockers."

"We certainly took nothing from your boat," said Tom, stiffly. "What is missing?"

"Many things," was the answer. "Among others, a number of trophy cups belonging to Boxer Hall College. I had them to repair, polish and engrave, and now they are gone from my boat. Someone must have taken them!" and he looked at the boys. The four chums felt their anger rising.

CHAPTER IV

IMPLIED ACCUSATION

FRANK SIMPSON was the first to take definite action. He looked sharply at the man, as the latter gave the surprising information about trophies, and then, in a low voice, said to his companions in the barge:

"Let's go ashore, fellows."

"What for; to be insulted again?" asked Tom. "I'm not going to stand for that fellow's insinuations. Who is he, anyhow?"

"I don't know," answered Frank, "and for the very same reason that I, neither, do not intend to stand for any imputation, I want to go ashore. Give way!"

They urged their heavy craft shoreward.

"They are certainly gone," went on the man, as he continued to rummage about in the wreckage of his boat. "And it means a big loss to me. If you boys were here——"

"Say, just hold on a minute, my friend," interrupted Frank, in that cool way of his. "Just go

a bit slow about making cracks. It might not be altogether healthy!" and the eyes of the Big Californian glowed.

"But I tell you it's a big loss!" went on the man. "I must find the things—money won't pay for them!"

"Now suppose we go at this thing systematically," suggested Frank, his chums, by common consent, letting him assume the leadership. "We don't any of us know you, except that we all recall seeing you land on the main shore in your motorboat a day or so ago. It was this same boat, I take it."

"The same," answered the man. "And now——"

"Wait," suggested Frank, holding up his hand. "As for us, we're Randall College students, as you can easily verify. We'll give you our names—fellows, cards," and Frank handed over one of his own, the others doing the same.

"That's all right," spoke the man, in half-sullen tones; "but that isn't going to bring back my stuff."

"Do you think we took it?" snapped Frank, and there was a warning glint in his eyes.

"No—not exactly—but you lads were at my boat, you say, and this is the first time I've seen it since I left it with those cups and other valuables in."

"Well, that's a long way from proving that we took anything," went on Frank. "It's laughable, or, it would be if it wasn't so serious."

"Who are you, anyhow?" burst out Tom Parsons, unable to restrain his curiosity longer. "This thing is getting too deep for me. How did you come to have the Boxer Hall trophy cups?"

"Perhaps I had better explain," went on the man. "I am Edward Farson, and I'm in the jewelry business in Haddonfield. I've only recently started up, and I'm working a new line of trade. I am an expert repairer and mender of old jewelry, and I find that many residents along the river here, as well as out in the country, have old jewelry they want made into modern forms.

"As I happened to own a motor-boat I decided to use that in making calls along the river, and I have been quite successful. Then learning that the colleges hereabouts had many cups and trophies that grew tarnished, or were broken, I solicited orders in that line. I also do engraving, putting the names of the winners and all that on the cups.

"The other day—the time I remember now when I saw you at Mr. Borden's dock—I had collected quite a few pieces of jewelry, some from customers, some from the students at Fairview Institute, and a number of trophy cups from Boxer Hall.

"I had a call to make at Mr. Borden's, and,

leaving the jewelry and cups in a box in one of the lockers of the boat, I ran my craft in the boat-house, as you saw, locked it up, and went up the hill to call on Mrs. Borden. As the box of valuables was rather heavy I did not want to carry it with me. I thought it would be safe."

"We heard you remark as much," interpolated Sid.

"Yes? Well, I expected to be back right away, but when I got to the house I found unexpected news awaiting me. There had come a telephone message from the clerk in my store, who knew that I was to be at Mrs. Borden's at a certain time. I had told him to that effect, as my elderly mother is very ill, and I wanted to be kept informed of her condition. The doctor communicated by wire with my clerk, and the latter left with Mrs. Borden a message to the effect that my mother was sinking, and that I was to hasten if I wanted to see her alive.

"That, as you may suppose, drove from my mind all thoughts of the valuables left in my boat. Or, if I did think of them at all, it must have been to hope that they would be safe, locked in the boat-house as they were, and with no one but myself—as I supposed—knowing of them.

"Mrs. Borden, whom I have known for some time, as soon as she had given me the message about my mother, offered me the use of a horse

and carriage to get my mother's house, which is quite a way back from the river, off in the country.

"I accepted and drove away, never even mentioning to Mrs. Borden about the jewelry in the locker of my boat. I said I would, on my return, collect the things she wanted repaired. Then I hastened to my mother.

"I found the dear old lady quite ill, and for a time her life was despaired of. But she rallied, and when my sister came to take charge of matters, I decided to come back to my business. But, in the meanwhile, as you know, there was the flood.

"When I went back to the Bordens, it was to find that their boathouse had been washed away by the high water, carrying my craft with it down to the lake. I was nearly crazy, not only at my own loss, but over the missing valuables, which I knew I could never replace. I borrowed a small boat to-day, and set off in search of my launch. I looked in several places where it might have lodged, and when I saw you boys—well, you know the rest," and the jeweler concluded with a pathetic air, as though his troubles was too much for him.

"It's rather a queer story," commented Frank. "As for our part in it, it is just as we told you. We landed here by accident, and saw the wreck

of the boat. We assumed what had happened, but we saw nothing of any box of cups and jewelry. Then we rowed away and met you."

"I'm much obliged to you for the information," said Mr. Farson, "and I—of course— I'm bound to believe you," he went on, a bit awkwardly. "Then you didn't see a trace of them?"

"Of course not!" cried Phil. "Don't you believe us?"

"Oh, yes—yes, of course. I only thought that maybe, as my boat is so broken up, and the parts scattered about, that you might have looked farther along the shores of the island. The box may have held together, and be lodged somewhere."

"Perhaps it has," said Frank, calmly. "I'd advise you to look thoroughly. You might find it. Come on, fellows," and he led the way back to the boat.

Tom Parsons acted as though he intended to speak, but Sid nudged him in the ribs, and the youth kept quiet.

Mr. Farson stared after the boys as though much disappointed at their desertion, and then, looking to the fastening of the rowing craft in which he had come ashore, he began walking along the edge of the island, where many signs of the high water still remained.

"What did you want to come away for in such

a hurry?" asked Tom, in a low voice, when they were some distance out. "You were on your high-horse for fair, Frank."

"And why shouldn't I be? Do you think I was going to stay there, and help him hunt, after he practically insulted us the way he did? As if we knew anything about his musty old jewelry!"

"That's right!" broke in Phil. "I wouldn't lift my hand to help him, after he made that implied accusation. We didn't see any of his stuff!"

"Oh, so that's the reason," replied Tom. "Well, I guess it was a good one, Frank."

"Those Boxer Hall lads will be up in the air all right when they learn that their trophies are gone," suggested Sid. "I wonder if there were any of the ones they won in the last meet?"

"They didn't get many," chuckled Frank. "But it will be quite a loss to them. However, it's none of our funeral. I wouldn't trust any of my jewelry to a man who would go off and leave it in a motor-boat for a night and a day."

"Oh, well, he didn't mean to. When he got that message about his mother, I suppose it flustered him," said Tom, in extenuation.

"It's hard to blame him," commented Frank. "But he's in a pickle all right. Now let's do some fast rowing."

They hit up the pace, but they did not have enough practice to maintain it, especially in the

heavy barge, and soon they were all panting, while the oars took the watter raggedly, and Sid caught a crab that nearly sent him overboard.

"I guess we need some coaching," admitted that lad, when he had recovered himself. "We're not racers yet, by a long shot. Slow down a bit, fellows."

"Oh, we're too soft!" complained Frank. "We'll never amount to anything in a shell if we can't stand this. Think of a four-mile row at top speed."

"But we'll be in better shape for it after a course of training and some coaching," declared Phil. "Then, too, we'll have this Summer vacation to practice in."

At slower speed they rowed up to their boathouse dock, and were soon strolling across the campus to their room, discussing the events of the last few hours.

"I can't get over the nerve of that jeweler!" exclaimed the Big Californian. "He nearly got me going."

"I could see that," commented Tom. "It was a good thing we came away when we did."

"Oh, well, he wasn't exactly responsible for what he said. Be a bit charitable," advised Sid.

"Well, how's the racing game progressing?" asked Holly Cross, as he met our friends. "When

is that second-hand shell coming so we can practice?"

"That's up to Dan Woodhouse," explained Tom. "Kindlings is chairman of that committee. Let's look him up."

"I wonder if Boxer Hall will row us in the Fall?" asked Bricktop Molloy, strolling up. "It will make a double season for them."

"I don't believe they'll dare refuse when we've beaten them at almost everything else," spoke Frank. "But we'll soon know about that. Dutch Housenlager said he had written to their crew captain and coach, and expected an answer soon."

"They ought to be glad to row us," commented Tom. "It will give them a chance to get more cups to replace those they lost."

"How lost?" asked Holly Cross. "What do you mean?"

"Oh, it's a great story!" cried Sid, and he proceeded to relate, aided by his chums, the incident of the smashed motor-boat.

"Too bad," commented Bricktop. "I know how we'd feel if such a thing happened here. But that fellow may find his stuff. Here comes Pete Backus. Hi, Grasshopper!" he called, to a long lad who imagined he was a champion jumper, "are you going to try for the crew?"

"I sure am," was the confident answer. "I

used to row a lot when a kid, and I guess I haven't forgotten."

"He's too light by fifteen pounds," declared Frank, in a low voice. "About one hundred and sixty is a good average."

"Thank goodness we're all of us that," said Tom, looking at the chums gathered about him.

"Are there going to be single races?" asked a lad, stepping up to join the group. He was a well dressed chap, reputed to be wealthy in his own right. His name was Reginald Boswell.

"Why, yes, Reggie," said Tom, in the drawling tones affected by the other, "we count on having single shells. Are you going to compete?"

"Aw, say, I wish you wouldn't call be Reggie. I hate that name!" exclaimed the lad, who was completing his Freshman year. "Cawn't you call me just—er—Boswell?"

"How would Bossy do for short, me lad?" asked Bricktop. "Not that you're a calf, you know; but Bossy has a sweet sound, thinkest thou not so, my comrades?" and he appealed to his chums with accompanying winks.

"Aw, I say now, quit spoofing me, cawn't you?" appealed the rich lad. "Bossy is too rotten silly, you know," and he drew a scented handkerchief from the pocket of his rather loud, and swagger clothes, which, as he always took the trouble to inform all who appeared interested, were made in

"Lunnon." Mr. Reginald Boswell had traveled abroad, it seemed.

"You ought to be thankful for any nickname, Bossy," put in Holly Cross. "It isn't every Freshman who is thus honored. It's going to be Bossy or nothing."

"Oh, but I say, Reggie isn't as bad as that!"

"Bossy or nothing!" insisted Bricktop.

"Well, then, tell me about the single shells," went on the rich student, evidently deciding to accept the less of two evils. "I'd like to row in those contests."

"Well, I guess you can—if you can make good," said Frank. "Come on, fellows," and he linked his arms in those of Sid and Tom, and walked them off toward their dormitory, followed by others of the chums, leaving Bossy, as he was generally called after that christening, to contemplate them with mingled feelings.

"Silly rotters!" he murmured after the manner of some of his English acquaintances. "I'll show them I can row, though!"

The news of the loss of the Boxer Hall cups was soon known all over Randall, and, in the next day or so, it was generally talked of, for there was a reward offered by the distracted jeweler, an article appearing in the local paper about it.

"I guess he didn't find any trace of them on the island," commented Sid.

"The box is probably at the bottom of the lake," was Tom's opinion.

It was several days after this that the four chums were in Haddonfield, partaking of a little supper after a vaudeville entertainment. There strolled into the restaurant some lads from Boxer Hall, among them one or two members of the eight-oared crew.

"Hello, Dave!" greeted Tom and the others.

"Too bad about your trophies; wasn't it," added Phil.

"Rotten!" conceded Dave. "Some of them were old timers, too."

"I—er—I understand that you lads were the *first* to discover the loss," put in Harry Cedstrom, one of the new students at Boxer Hall, and a member of the crew. There was a strange emphasis on the word "first."

"The *first* to discover it—what do you mean?" asked Frank Simpson, bristling up.

"I mean that you were first at the wrecked boat that had held the box of jewelry," went on Harry, while some of his companions nudged him to keep him quiet.

"We happened to be there," admitted Frank, in a quiet voice that, to his friends, always presaged an outburst of righteous indignation. "We saw the wrecked boat, and called the attention of the owner to it. We went back with him, and then

he told us his loss. That's how we happened to be the first, after Mr. Farson himself."

"Oh, I see," spoke Harry. "Then you were at the boat *before* he was?"

"Cut it out; can't you?" demanded Dave of his friend, in a hoarse whisper.

"Yes," said Frank quietly, "we were there before Mr. Farson," and he looked the other student straight in the eyes.

"And you didn't see anything of our cups?"

"Just what do you mean?" demanded Frank quietly, half rising in his chair, while Tom laid a hand on him in restraint.

"Oh," went on Harry easily, "I thought maybe you fellows might have taken our trophies——"

"Hold on!" cried Frank, and he arose with such suddenness that his chair overturned. Tom arose also, and clung to the arm of the Big Californian, whispering rapidly:

"Quiet, Frank. Keep quiet! Don't have a row here!"

"In a joke!" finished Harry Cedstrom with an attempt at a smile. There was a dead silence in the groups of students.

CHAPTER V

THE CLUE

FRANK SIMPSON stared at the Boxer Hall lad for a moment, and then sank back in the chair which Sid Henderson had replaced for him. Harry seemed to breathe easier, and certainly there were looks of relief on the faces of his companions.

"A joke?" repeated Frank, grimly. "Well, if that is your idea of a joke, all I have to say is that your early education was sadly neglected. Fellows, I guess it's my treat. Some more of those seltzer lemonades, waiter," and turning his back, with studied indifference, on the Boxer Hall lads, Frank began to chat with his friends.

There was an uneasy movement among the students from Boxer Hall.

"I tell you he insulted me!" Harry could be heard to fiercely whisper, as he made an effort to rise.

"Now you sit right still!" said Dave Ogden, firmly. "If there was any insulting done, it was on your part first. I tell you to drop it. Randall is our rival, in more ways than one, but no one ever yet accused her of unfair tactics—least of all

any of those fellows. You cut it out, Cedstrom, or you won't know what happened to you!"

"That's right," chimed in Pinky Davenport, another Boxer lad. "That was a raw thing for you to say, Cedstrom, and it might make trouble for us."

"I don't care!" exclaimed the other, defiantly. "I wanted to take those fellows down a peg. The idea of them thinking they can row us!"

"Well, we'll give them all the chance in the world," declared Dave, good-naturedly; "but I think they'll never see the bow of our shell in an eight-oared race. It takes more than one season to turn out champions."

"That's right," agreed Pinky. "But you go a bit slow, Cedstrom. Those fellows are good friends of ours, even if they are rivals."

"All right—no harm intended," said the other, seeing that he had gone too far.

Aside from uneasy glances from time to time toward their rivals, our friends showed no further interest in the unpleasant incident. It had not come to the notice of others in the restaurant, for the students were in a room that, by custom, was set aside for their exclusive use.

"You got his number all right, Frank," commented Phil.

"That's what," chimed in Sid.

"Well, I wasn't going to stand for any crack

like that," declared Frank. "Especially from a Freshman. He may have meant it, and he may not, but the time to put the screws on is in the beginning."

The two parties broke up soon after that, most of the Boxer Hall boys nodding friendly good-nights to their rivals as they passed out.

"What's the matter, Frank?" asked Tom, a little later, as they gathered in their common study, and the tall pitcher "flopped" down beside his chum on the old sofa. At once there was a cracking, splintering sound, and Sid cried out in alarm.

"Cheese it, you fellows! Do you want to spoil that completely? Remember it's an invalid."

"I should say so!" cried Tom, getting off as carefully as a skater goes over thin ice, while Frank held his breath. "I didn't mean to come down so hard."

"Oh, student spare that couch,
Touch not a single spring.
In sleep it resteth me,
As nice as anything!"

Thus Phil misquoted, adapting it to suit his needs.

"Punk!" commented Tom.

"Fierce!" cried Sid. "That's an old one."

"Say, you fellows don't know good poetry when it comes up and shakes hands with you," declared

Phil, in disgusted tones. "I'm going to frame that."

"We'll have to have a new frame for the couch if Tom does any more of his gymnastic stunts," declared Frank, as he loked to see what damage had been done. "The back's nearly broken again," he added.

"Kindly forgive me," spoke the pitcher, in contrite tones. "But those two hulks have the armchairs, and I wanted some place to rest. I guess we'll have to invest in another chair, if that couch is only going to hold one."

"We will not, you vandal!" exclaimed Phil. "Sit on the alarm clock, if you want to, or flop down on the floor, or to go to bed; but you don't go getting any new, modern, ugly, incongruous furniture into this den."

"Oh, I didn't mean that," Tom hastened to explain. "I meant pick up a second- hand one somewhere."

"That mightn't be so bad," admitted Frank.

"But say, what ails you, anyhow?" went on Tom, turning to the Big Californian, as though to change the subject. "I was asking you that when they raised this row about the old couch."

"Don't you call that an 'old couch' unless in terms of the deepest respect!" cried Phil.

"I meant it strictly in the Pickwickian sense," Tom hastened to explain. "But, Frank, is there anything up?"

"Well, yes, there is," admitted the other.

His chums looked at him curiously.

"I hope you didn't take that Boxer Hall puppy's remarks seriously," went on Tom.

"Not seriously, no; and yet what he said has set me to thinking."

"Hurray! Frank's thinking at last!" cried Sid. "Send word to Pitchfork, and he'll give you a double stunt in Latin."

"No, but seriously," went on the Big Californian, "you heard what he said. In a joking way, as I really think he meant it, he suggested that we might know something of the missing cups and jewelry, seeing that we were first on the scene—or, at least, as far as is known. Now if he thought that—even in a joke—and the jeweler thought it seriously—as I am convinced he did—though he soon passed it up—why shouldn't other people?"

"Do you think they do?" asked Sid.

"They might, and what I've been thinking is that we can't afford to have even the slightest suspicion hanging over us."

"But does there?" demanded Tom.

"I don't know—there's a possibility that there might. You see, fellows, we *could* have taken those things!"

"We could!" cried Phil.

"Certainly. Just figure it out for a moment," went on Frank. "We might as well look at this

thing fairly and squarely. Say that box of jewelry was in the wrecked boat when we found it on the point of Crest Island. Say we found it to contain the Boxer Hall trophies. We could have taken them even for a joke; couldn't we?"

"Yes, but we didn't," declared Phil.

"No, but that won't stop people from thinking so. They may set it down as a college prank, but, even so, they'll think it just the same."

"Well?" asked Sid, as Frank paused.

"Well, that's what I was thinking of when Tom plumped down, and broke the sofa."

"I didn't break it."

"You came mighty near it," went on Frank. "I was turning that over in my mind after what happened in the restaurant, and I've got something to propose."

"What is it?" demanded Phil, leaning forward so interestedly and suddenly that the old armchair creaked and groaned dismally, and a cloud of dust arose from its ancient upholstery.

"I think we ought to go back to Crest Island, and make a search. We may find that box of cups and jewelry caught in some cleft of the rocks, or we may find——"

Again Frank paused.

"What?" asked Tom.

"A clue to who did take it—if it was taken."

There was a moment of silence, and then Sid exclaimed:

"Frank's dead right! We'll go to Crest Island to-morrow and hunt for clues."

Eagerly the matter was discussed, and in the end all four agreed that they would make the search. Then came an hour of studying, and the lights went out.

"Oh, for the love of baked beans!" exclaimed Tom, as they were all settled comfortable in bed. "Somebody stop that clock, will you? I'll furnish the toothpick."

"Get up and do it yourself," directed Frank. "I'm too comfortable."

"So am I," said Sid.

"Same here," came from Phil.

"Then I suppose I've got to," groaned Tom, and in the end he did. Then, with the fussy, little alarmer quiet, the chums dropped off, their thoughts lasting longest on the prospective races, and on the queer muddle of the lost trophies.

"Well, here's where the boat was," said Tom, as they landed on Crest Island the next afternoon.

"But it's gone now," added Phil.

"Yes, probably Mr. Farson had it towed away on a barge to see if he could save any of it. My opinion is that it wasn't worth it," said Sid.

"Well, let's scatter, two going down one shore of the island, and two on the other," suggested

Frank. "When the boat struck on the rocks, and split, the things in the lockers may have floated one way or the other."

"If they didn't sink," put in Tom. "A box of jewelry would be pretty heavy."

"If it sank, so much the better," declared the Big Californian. "Then it would lodge, and when the waters went down, as they did after the flood, it would still stay there. Scatter and hunt."

They took his advice, and for an hour or more searched. Then Tom, who was with Frank, on the eastern shore, sprang toward a clump of bushes in which was caught some driftwood.

"I've found something!" he cried. "It looks like the seat lockers of a motor-boat."

"It is," declared his chum, as he hurried to Tom's side.

There, in the debris that had settled around the roots of the bush when the waters had subsided, was part of a boat locker. It was split and broken, but the cover was still on it. Eagerly Tom lifted it and, as he did so he uttered a cry of delight.

"Here it is!" he shouted. "The jeweler's box! It has his name on it!"

"Open it!" exclaimed Frank, as Sid and Phil came hurrying to join their two chums.

Tom lifted the cover.

"Empty!" he cried, blankly.

CHAPTER VI

THE PRACTICE SHELL

THE four chums stared, almost uncomprehendingly, into the open box. It was of good size, capable of holding several trophy cups, with compartments, velvet lined, for smaller pieces of jewelry.

"The things all fell out!" cried Tom. "They must be scattered around here somewhere. Let's look," and he started off.

"No use," said Frank, quietly.

"Why not?" asked Tom, in wonder.

"Because those things never fell out of that box," went on the Big Californian.

"Why didn't they?" demanded Phil. "When the box was knocked around in the water, or even inside the locker, why wouldn't it be split open and the things fall out?"

"It wasn't split, as you can easily see," went on Frank, calmly, "and the cover wasn't forced open by banging against the rocks. It was opened by some slender instrument being shoved under the catch, and then pried upon. See, there are the

marks. No rocks ever made those," and he showed several scratches in the shiny surface of the box, near the clasp. The scratches went entirely under the broad brass fastener, showing that something thin enough to have been employed in this way was used. As Frank had said, no rock against which the case might have been tossed by the storm-waters, could have done it.

"Well, let's take it to Mr. Farson," went on Sid. "We'll tell him how we found it, and he can then see that we had nothing to do with taking the things—even in a joke. Let's hurry back to town."

"Let's do nothing of the sort!" exclaimed Frank quickly.

"Why not?" demanded his chums in chorus.

"If you want tongues to wag any more—if you want a real suspicion to be cast on us, where there's only the faintest one now—if you want to make real trouble, take that box to Mr. Farson. If you don't, and if you want to get at the real facts in this case, just keep quiet about it."

For a moment there was silence, and then Tom objected:

"Well, maybe it's clear to you, Frank, but I can't see it that way."

"Me either," declared Phil.

"Why, it's as simple as anything," declared the Big Californian.

"Well, maybe it is," admitted Sid, "but kindly translate. It's too deep for us."

"Look here," went on Frank. "That jeweler saw us at the wreck; didn't he?"

"No question about that," admitted Tom.

"And we helped him look around. We were here first; and we said we didn't see anything of the stuff."

"No question about that," admitted Sid, following Tom's lead.

"And now here we go and find the empty box—it has every appearance of having been forced open by human hands. We take it to Mr. Farson, and say—'Here's your box, Mr. Jeweler; but it's empty—that's just how we found it, honest it is!' Say, wouldn't he smell a rat right away, and think we had the stuff?"

"No question about that," declared Phil. "That ends it! Frank is right, we'll have to keep mum about this for our own sakes, though I don't like it. It makes us look guilty."

"Not a bit of it," declared Frank, stoutly. "It gives us a chance to find out who the guilty party is."

"Who do you suppose it is?" asked Tom.

"I haven't the least idea," answered the California lad, quickly. "Someone may have been on the island before we were, and found, and rifled, the box; or that person may have come

after we did. That's one thing we've got to find out—and it isn't going to be any cinch, take it from me!"

They all examined the box, and then looked about the place where it had been found, for other clues. But they found none—no other parts of the wrecked boat seemed to be there.

As they were coming away, to get to their boat and row to Randall, Tom stooped and picked from the ground a bit of gaudily-colored silk, a plaid of many colors, in a sort of ribbon.

"What's that?" asked Sid.

"Looks like part of a Scotch necktie," replied the tall pitcher.

"Let's have a look," suggested Frank, as he closely examined the piece of silk. "That's no part of a necktie!" he exclaimed. "It's a piece of a Mexican silk handkerchief of all the colors of the rainbow. I've seen 'em on sale out in my state. The Mexicans and some other folks are fond of sporting them, but they were always too rich for my blood. But, fellows, do you notice one thing about this?" and he held it up for inspection.

"Do you mean it might have been worn by the jeweler, and dropped in his motor-boat?" asked Tom.

"It *might* have been worn by the jeweler, but not very likely," said Frank. "In the first place,

notice that it shows no signs of having been wet, except by the dew. It was never in the flood, or it would have mud on it. And I don't believe it was worn by the jeweler, and dropped here; otherwise, having good eyesight, as all jewelers and watch repairers have, he would have seen his box."

"Then you think——," began Sid.

"That it was dropped here by someone who was on this island either before, or after, we were here the first time; by someone who found the box, opened it, and took the stuff away," finished Frank.

"And who that person was it's up to us to find out," declared Tom.

"Exactly. And here's another thing," went on Frank, "this piece of silk is torn off in a long strip, cleanly, and it looks to me as if it might have been one of several so torn, or ripped, to make a bundle of the cups and jewelry. If we can find a handkerchief like this, with a strip torn off, we'll come pretty close to the person who has the Boxer Hall cups," finished the Big Californian.

"Maybe the fellow tore off a couple of strips, used the main part of his handkerchief in which to wrap his stuff, and left one strip here by mistake," suggested Phil.

"Maybe," admitted Frank. "Well, we've got about all we can find here, I guess. I vote we get back, and talk this matter over among ourselves. And, mind, not a word to a soul!"

All promised and then, carefully concealing in their boat the jewelry box, with the piece of silk inside, they rowed back to college.

But the discussion they brought to bear on the matter in their room later, failed to throw any light on the subject. All the conclusion they could come to was that if they found the owner of the gaudy handkerchief they might find the possessor of the jewelry.

In the days that followed rowing matters occupied much of the attention and the talk of the Randall students. The chairmen of the various committees called meetings, and made reports of progress to the general athletic body. The offer of the alumni to provide a fine boathouse, and a rowing equipment, was formally accepted, and the required promise made.

There was no lack of material for an eight-oared shell—two in fact—several fours, a couple of doubles, and one or two singles. In response to a request for a list of what was needed, it was decided to ask for one first-class eight-oared shell, for two fours, two doubles, and three singles, though the gift committee, naturally, would do as they thought best. This would give plenty of craft in which to practice. In view of the expense of the eight-oared shell it was decided that the students themselves would subscribe enough to purchase a second-hand eight for practice.

They learned of one in good condition, that could be had at a bargain, also a single and a four, and, as it would take some time for the generous old graduates to provide their equipment, it was voted to buy the second-hand ones for use the remainder of that Spring.

"That will give us a little time for practice," decided Kindlings, who had the matter in charge. He had been elected temporary captain of a tentative eight crew; a temporary arrangement, as it would not be known, until the coach had selected the crew, who would row in the different craft. There would be try-outs as soon as possible.

The old boathouse would have to answer until the new one was built, but, to accommodate the many students who now thronged it, a temporary addition was built, the coming warm weather making it unnecessary to have it very substantial.

The interest in rowing increased every day. Our four chums and their friends were perhaps the foremost in showing their delight in the coming events.

Boxer Hall had been communicated with, as had Fairview Institute, and both had agreed to enter into triangular-league contests that Fall, the details to be arranged later.

The second-hand shells had been ordered, and Mr. Lighton agreed to do the water coaching, in addition to looking after the baseball lads, for

the affairs of the diamond were beginning to hold the attention of many. Of course our friends did not lose interest in baseball because of the coming water sports.

Meanwhile no further trace of the missing cups or jewelry had been found. No one claimed the reward offered by Mr. Farson, to which the Boxer Hall Athletic Association added a substantial sum for the recovery of their trophies. Our friends said nothing of their find, and, though there was hardly a breath of suspicion against them, even in Boxer Hall, still they fretted.

"We've just got to find out who took those things!" cried Tom, one afternoon, coming back from a row on the river.

"That's right!" agreed his chums.

A number of the ordinary rowing boats had been secured, and Mr. Lighton spent some time giving the lads an idea of the rudiments of getting down to the right stroke. Of course with toe stretchers, and sliding seats, there would come a vast change, so he did not want to go too deeply into the matter until the right craft were at hand.

"Well, what shall we do this afternoon?" asked Sid, as he yawningly tossed aside a book that he had dipped into on coming to his room after a lecture.

"I'm for a row!" exclaimed Tom.

"We ought to do some baseball practice," sug-

gested Phil. "We've sort of been letting that slide."

"Let's do a little of——" began Frank, when the door flew open, and in came Kindlings, all excited.

"It's come!" he cried.

"What?" chorused the others.

"The new shell—I mean the second-hand eight—the boat we're going to do our practice in! I just got word from the freight office that it's there. Let's get a truck, and have it carted to the river. I'm crazy to get in and go for a row!"

"Hurray! That's the stuff!" cried Tom. "Come on, everybody!" and he led the way, the others following.

CHAPTER VII

THE FIRST TRIAL

"WELL, now we have it, what shall we do with it?"

"Say, but it's a frail thing all right!"

"Looks as if one good stroke would split it in two."

"And that will hold eight men!"

"Nine, counting the coxswain, you gump! Didn't you ever see an eight-oared shell before?"

"Not so close at hand! Say, but it's flimsy all right."

"Oh, I guess we'll find it stiff enough for us."

These were only a few of the comments, and questions, propounded by the students of Randall as they gathered about the new shell—or, rather, the second-hand one—that had been purchased in order to give them practice while the new outfit was being made.

Following the enthusiastic announcement of Kindlings, as detailed in the last chapter, the more eager of the rowing contingent, including our four

heroes, had gone to the freight depot, and, procuring a truck had, with great care and patience, transported the boat, well swathed in burlap, to the river. Later, under the direction of Coach Lighton, they had attached the outriggers, gotten out the oars, given the boat another coat of varnish, oiled it well, and now it rested in the water alongside the dock, as lightly as a swan, if not as gracefully.

"It looks more like a water-spider than anything else," commented Jerry Jackson, one of the Jersey twins.

"Here! Can that!" cried Tom. "No finding fault with our boat, or we'll duck you."

"That's what!" declared Dutch Housenlager. "Let's get in and take a try!" he proposed, starting toward the frail craft, and preparing to step in it.

"Here! Hold on!" cried Mr. Lighton, in accents of alarm. "That's no way to get into a shell. Now you fellows just hold your breaths until I give you a few points."

The lads—a score or more—all of whom hoped to make the eight, while others felt that they would be satisfied in the fours, or singles, had gathered around. They had all helped to get the shell into shape, pending the arrival of some more of the second-hand craft. Now they were eager to try their skill.

"It is too early to pick out the crew yet," said Mr. Lighton, "as I don't know what any of you can do. So I suggest that you all have a try, and those that develop the most aptitude will come in for more consideration. Have you thought of anyone for permanent captain? Wait, though, I guess you'd better let that go until you see how you make out in rowing. And, as for the coxswain —who want's to be coxswain?" he asked.

"Don't all speak at once," he added whimsically. "Remember that, while it's a post of honor, the coxswain doesn't row, though by steering he assumes almost as much responsibility as all the rest put together, for a well-steered boat often means a winning one. We want a light weight for coxswain," and he looked over the assembled group.

No one volunteered and the coach went on:

"Well, at the risk of seeming egotistical, I'll assume that post myself, for the time being, though I'm a bit heavy. I think I can coach you better from that position—at least at the start. Now then, I guess we're ready. Whom shall we try first?"

Once more he looked around.

"Holly Cross," he called, and that lad stepped forward, then: "Kindlings, Phil Clinton, Tom Parsons, Frank, Sid," went on the coach.

A pause.

"Yes, come ahead, Housenlager," said the coach, as Dutch made an eager move. "Let's see, that's seven. Where's Bricktop. Not here. Joe Jackson."

"I'm afraid I'm a bit light," said the Jersey twin.

"Well, perhaps you are. You may fill in later, though, as coxswain, or row in one of the other boats. I guess——"

"I'd like to row!" exclaimed someone.

Reginald Boswell stepped forward, a smile of confidence on his face.

"I've done considerable of it," he added, with an air of assurance. To do him justice he was a well-built lad, and those who had seen him out on the river knew he could pull a good oar. Whether he had racing qualities in him remained to be seen.

"Very well," said the coach, quietly. "We'll give you a trial. That makes the eight. Now then, who'll be for stroke? Simpson, I think I'll try you. You look as though you could set the pace. For number seven—um! Parsons, you try that, though we may change later. Remember that number seven, who sits directly behind stroke, has almost as important a position, for he has to pick up the stroke promptly, and the rest of the crew is dependent, in a great measure, on what number seven does.

"Now, let me see. Boswell, you'll be bow oar.

Phil Clinton number two, Sid Henderson at three, Housenlager at four, Woodhouse number five, and Cross at six. Now I guess we're all ready. Steady the boat there, some of you, while the crew gets in."

Dutch Housenlager once more eagerly started for the boat, and extended his foot to step down into it at his designated seat.

"Wait! Wait!" cried the coach. "Don't get into a shell that way. Remember that it's almost as thin as its name indicates. Put your foot lengthwise of the keelson, not athwart, or you may force your heel or toe through the sides. Have all of you your rubber-soled shoes on?"

"Sure," replied Dutch, a bit abashed. A glance showed that all were in sufficiently regular rowing costume.

"Now, while we're at it, I might as well tell you how properly to get in a shell," went on the coach. "You may all listen, as you can't tell whom it may fit.

"In the first place take your oar, and, if you're to row on the side of the shell that happens to be nearest the float at the time, lay your blade on the platform. If you're on the water side, lay the blade flat on the surface of the water.

"Now get in, facing the stern, being careful to step lengthways, as I told Housenlager. Stoop down, with a hand on either gunwhale, and lower

yourself into your seat. You will of course notice the seats slide back and forth, that you have outriggers instead of gunwhale oarlocks, and that there are stretchers, or loops under which to thrust your toes.

"Once in your seat, ship your oar by thrusting the handle in through the outrigger oarlock from outside. Sit straight, not to one side, and squarely face the handle of your oar, have your shoulders a bit back, and your elbows close to your flanks. I'll give you more points as we go along.

"Hold your oar with the outside hand close to the end of the handle, but not over the edge of it. You get more power from your outside hand, remember. The 'outside' hand, strange as it may seem, is the one nearest the centre of the boat, and the inside one, that nearest the 'loom,' spoon, body or blade of the oar. Put the other hand not more than two and a half inches from the outside hand. Thumbs underneath, or toward the bottom of the boat, of course; though some men row with the thumb of one hand in the same position as the fingers.

"And now then, to give you brief instructions in how to row. First give a full, fair reach out over your toes, with both arms perfectly straight, dip your oar in the water—plunge it in with force. Get a good hold on the water with the blade, and the instant it is immersed, pull with all your might,

and then follow through, as we say, with a long, firm stroke without vibration or wavering.

"Then, with a light finish, get your oar blade clear of the water cleanly, feather light, low and quick—into the water again all together with a 'chug'—another pull and—there you are—you're rowing!"

There was silence for a moment, and then Tom remarked:

"Sounds easy; doesn't it?"

"Yes, and some of you will find it easy," remarked Mr. Lighton, with a smile. "Others will not. But we can tell soon who the rowers are going to be, though that is not saying that, with practice, some of those who seem the least fitted may not become very proficient."

"I once belonged to a swell New York club," remarked Reginald Boswell.

"Why did they put you out, Bossy?" asked Kindlings, with a wink at Sid.

"They didn't—I resigned," and the rich lad shot an indignant glance at his tormentor.

"Same thing," remarked Kindlings.

"Now then, get into the shell, and we'll try a little spin," called the coach, and he watched carefully as each of the eight lads followed his instructions more or less accurately. Some were a bit awkward, but all were careful to at least step into the shell properly.

"Push off," commanded the coxswain-coach, as he took his seat in the stern, with the tiller ropes in his hands. "You will notice that some of you are on what is called the stroke side—that is, with your oars on the same side as Frank Simpson, who faces me. So when I say 'stroke side pull,' it means that only those on that side, or at my right hand, are to row.

"Oppositely, some of you are on what is known as the bow side, or with your oars on the side on which sits Boswell, the bow oar. That is on my left. Though, of course, you all sit in the middle of the boat. So when I give orders for the stroke oars to do certain things I mean for those on Frank's side to obey. Now then, row, stroke oars!"

Four blades shot back and took the water, not all at once, as they should have done, but fairly well for the first time. As the craft was heading down stream, with the stroke oars nearest the float, this manœuver tended to swing the craft farther out into the river to clear the dock.

"Row, bows!" came the order, and the others, dipping their blades, slewed the craft around until she was straight again, and far enough out to enable a good start to be made.

"Very good!" complimented the coach. "Now then, row all!"

The frail shell, like some grotesque water

spider, darted ahead, the water swirling under the broad blades.

"Hurray!" yelled the crowd along the bank and on the dock.

"They're off!" shouted Jerry Jackson.

"The first spin!" added his brother. "I wonder if we can turn out a winning crew?"

"Of course we can, Joe me lad!" cried Bricktop Molloy, coming up at that moment. "Of course that's not sayin' it wouldn't be much better with me in the boat, but it can't be helped now. I'm a bit late," he added. "Ten thousand maledictions on Pitchfork for detainin' me. But who's that at bow?"

"Bossy," some one told him.

"That calf! Sure he can row though!" the Irish student added, half-admiringly, as he watched the efforts of the rich lad.

The shell was well out in the river now, spinning along at a rapid pace. Of course it was far from being at racing speed, but even a little power sent the knife-like boat along at a great rate, so little resistance was there.

"Steady all!" called Mr. Lighton, in a low voice, as he noticed a tendency to splash on the part of some. "Get your oars in the water with force. Get hold of the water all together. When you do, it will sound like a stone falling in—a chug—a noise like a 'rotten egg', as it is called.

Try for that. The eight oars ought to sound like a single pair when you learn to row in unison.

"Pick it up a little faster, bow!" he called to Boswell.

"This is the way I learned to row," came the retort from the bow oar.

"Well, you'll have to unlearn some things," retorted the coach, grimly.

"Don't look so worried, Tom," he went on a little later. "You're picking up your stroke fairly well. Frank, a little more forward—reach out well over your toes. That's better. Now let's hit it up a little."

They had been rowing about twenty strokes per minute—rather slow, and, as Mr. Lighton indicated an increase, Frank followed, until they were doing twenty-four, a substantial advance. As they rowed along, Tom glanced away from Frank's rising and falling back, and said in a low voice:

"Here comes Boxer Hall!"

CHAPTER VIII

RUTH'S LOSS

"SILENCE number seven—eyes in the boat—on the man in front of you!"

Thus the coach called to Tom, but there was no sting in his words, and the tall baseball pitcher of Randall knew that it was for the good of himself and the crew. Nothing is so important in a race as to save one's wind, and to keep one's eyes fairly glued on the back of the man in front of one. For on unison, and in rowing exactly in time with every other man in the shell, does the race depend.

"Never mind Boxer Hall," went on Mr. Lighton. "We're going to beat her, but we won't unless we learn how to keep our eyes in our own boat. Steady there, Sid!"

On came the Boxer Hall eight. They were rowing down the stream, as were our friends, but the rival college shell was in the rear, having gone up stream earlier in the day, being now on the return trip.

"Don't try to race them when they pass us,"

cautioned Mr. Lighton, who had not even turned his head to see the approaching shell behind him. "It will be a temptation, I know, but we are not ready for a spurt yet."

"Are we going to let them pass us?" demanded the rich lad, almost forgetting to row.

"Don't talk!" came sharply from the coxswain. "It's your business to row, Boswell, if you want to be in this eight. You almost lost a stroke then, and see how the boat slews! I have to shift the rudder to correct it, and in a race that might mean the loss of considerable distance. Pick up your stroke, and don't race!"

The face of the rich lad expressed disappointment, and his was not the only one. Certainly it was a bit galling to let Boxer Hall—their ancient rival—pass them, and the first time Randall was out in her eight, too!

But afterward all admitted the wisdom of the course taken by the coach. They were in no condition to race, and, green as most of them were as to how to behave in a tricky shell, they might have had an upset. Not they would have minded that, but they would have been the laughing-stock of Boxer Hall.

On came the rivals, the oars being feathered beautifully. They took the water with that peculiar chugging sound that always denotes a well-trained crew.

"Listen, all of you," advised Mr. Lighton in a low voice. "That's what I mean by the 'rotten-egg' sound. It's when the oar blade is plunged under water as you begin your stroke. Try to attain it—after they pass."

The Boxer Hall lads, rowing perhaps a trifle faster than they had been doing, sitting perhaps a trifle straighter, and pulling a bit harder—a natural showing off—came opposite the shell containing our friends of Randall.

"Want to try a little spurt?" called Dave Ogden, from the coxswain's seat.

"No, thank you—we're just out for practice. It's our first spin," replied Mr. Lighton. "Some other time."

"Why not now?" murmured Boswell.

"Silence in the bow!" exclaimed the coach, sharply.

"You're a martinet!" retorted the rich lad, but in so low a voice that only Phil, sitting in front of him, heard.

Not a lad in the Boxer Hall shell spoke, though several nodded in friendly fashion at their acquaintances in the Randall boat. They were evidently well trained, and were saving their wind.

On they rowed, passing those who hoped to prove themselves formidable rivals by the following Fall. And in spite of the command of Mr. Lighton for all eyes to be in the boat, hardly a

lad of the eight but glanced enviously at the smoothly-swinging shell, that looked so trim and so neat. For, in spite of the work expended on the second-hand craft, it showed what it was.

"But it won't be long before we have a better one," thought Tom.

"Row easy, all," came the command from the coach, when the Boxer Hall boat had passed around a bend of the stream.

The stroke was slackened, to the relief of all, for, though they were sturdy lads, rowing was a form of exercise to which they were not much accustomed, especially in a shell. The strangeness of the seats, the toe stretchers, and the outriggers added to their confusion, so that the fatigue was almost as much one of attention and brain power as of muscle.

"Now for a turn against the current," remarked the coach, when they had gone on a mile or two more. "This will give you some resistance to work against."

The shell was turned, after a fashion, Mr. Lighton being anxious not to bring too much strain on the outriggers, the turning action always involving this.

"Give way!" came the command, and the shell started back up stream.

This was harder work, but the coach, desiring to know if he had any members on the crew who

were likely to prove of less service than the others, kept them all up to a good stroke. There was some panting when the float was reached, a larger crowd than before being there to welcome the first tentative crew. But, to do the lads justice, not one but had stood the strain well, even the fault-finding Boswell.

"Well rowed for the first time!" complimented Mr. Lighton. "Now, then, a good shower bath and a rub-down, and then some light exercise to keep from getting stiff, for you have used muscles to-day that seldom came into play before. Now who's for another crew?" and he picked out eight more lads, who went off in the shell.

"That was great!" cried Tom, as, with his three particular chums he started for the gymnasium.

"It sure was," agreed Sid. "I never thought I could do so well."

"And I never knew I could do so rotten!" came from Frank. "I used to think I was some pumpkins with an oar, but this has taken all the conceit out of me."

"Same here," agreed Phil. "But I think we're on the right road."

"Boxer Hall did fine," went on Tom. "I give them credit for that. I wish we'd started at rowing years ago. It's a shame it was so neglected at Randall."

"It was dandy of those old grads to think to put us in the way of it once more," went on Sid. "We'll have to pass them a vote of thanks."

Thus talking the boys went into the gymnasium, whence they emerged a little later, glowing, and feeling the spring and buoyancy of youth.

"Hello, what's this?" asked Phil, as they entered their room, and saw some letters on the table.

"From the girls!" cried Tom, as he saw a certain hand-writing.

"Here, you've got mine!" declared Frank, making a grab for the epistle in Sid's hand.

"Beg your pardon old man—so I have. I'll trade," and soon the four lads were busy perusing four notes.

"They're going to have a dance," spoke Tom. "A week from to-night. Will we go? I guess yes! That is, I don't think we have any date for that evening."

"If I have I'll break it," said Sid, quickly.

"Listen to the old misogynist—him as wouldn't used to speak to a girl!" cried Phil. "Oh, what a change! What a change!"

"Dry up!" commanded Sid, making a reach for his chum, who nimbly escaped by leaping behind the sofa.

"Say, this is pretty indefinite," went on Tom. "They just ask us to come, and don't say who's to take who, or anything like that."

"And there are a new lot of fellows at Fairview," said Frank. "I move that we go over and make sure of our girls. I don't want to get left."

"I should have thought Ruth would be more definite," put in Phil. "But say, we've got time to run over and back before grub. Come on."

Regardless of the fact that they had just come in from a hard row, they soon got into their "semi-best suits," as Sid called them, and hurried to the trolley that would land them at the co-educational institution.

"There are the girls!" exclaimed Tom, who, being in the lead, as he and his chums crossed the campus a little later, saw the four; Ruth, Madge Tyler, Mabel Harrison and Helen Newton.

They paired off—as they always did— and soon were walking in different directions. Tom was with Ruth Clinton, and after the matter of the dance had been settled, and she had agreed to accompany him, as doubtless the other girls had done for the other lads, the tall pitcher, with a glance at his pretty companion remarked:

"New pin, Ruth? Where did you get it?" and he looked at her collar-fastening.

"Hush!" she exclaimed, looking quickly around. "Don't tell Phil!"

"Why not?" Tom wanted to know. "Doesn't he want you to have jewelry?"

"Yes, but listen, you remember that dear old-

fashioned brooch I used to wear? The one with the secret spring in the back, that, when you pressed on it, showed a little picture of me. Do you remember that?"

"Do I? I should say I did! And how you dropped it at a dance once, and I had to crawl down under the palms in the conservatory to get it."

"And you in your dress suit, poor boy!" and Ruth laughed. "I should say you might well remember it. But, Tom, this is serious," and she grew grave at once. "I've lost that brooch!"

"Lost it—how?"

"Or, rather, it's been stolen, and I don't dare tell Phil. You know the clasp was broken, or something was the matter with it. That's the reason it fell off that time you had to hunt for it."

"And did it drop again ? Tell me where, and I'll search until——"

"No, Tom, it wouldn't do any good," and Ruth sighed.

"Why not?"

"Because it's been stolen!"

"Stolen!"

"Yes. Listen. I feel dreadfully about it. You know it was a gift from my grandmother. She is a dear, old-fashioned lady, and she has lots of lovely old-fashioned jewelry. She always said she disliked the present styles, and when she gave me

that pin she made me promise to wear it, and never be ashamed of it, even if it was a century old.

"Of course I promised, for the pin *was* a beauty. And grandmother always said that if I took good care of it, and wore it whenever I went out, she would leave me her lovely string of pearls. Of course I would have worn the pin without that. And now it's been taken!"

"Taken! By someone here at college?"

"Hush, not so loud! I gave it to a jeweler, a Mr. Farson, in Haddonfield, to repair the clasp, and I just got word from him to-day that it was taken. So I had to buy another pin to fasten my collar with, and I'm so afraid Phil will notice it; or that grandmother may hear about it! She'll say I'm careless."

"Did Farson have your brooch?" cried Tom.

"Yes. Why?"

"And did he tell you how it was taken?"

"Well, he said it was taken with a lot of other things that he had collected from his customers to repair. He offered to get me another, but of course I never can get on like that."

"Say!" exclaimed Tom, greatly excited. "Your pin must have been in that box he left in his motor-boat, when the craft was wrecked on Crest Island and when the Boxer Hall cups were taken. By Jove! This brings that robbery home to me all right!" and Tom looked strangely at Ruth.

CHAPTER IX

ON CREST ISLAND

"WHAT do you mean?" cried the girl, impressed by Tom's strange manner.

"Why, didn't you hear? This jeweler had been going about collecting work for repairing, and left a lot of it in a box in his boat. Then he was called away suddenly, and remained away over night. A flood came up, swept his boat away, wrecked it on Crest Island, and we four fellows found it there. But the jewelry case was empty. Didn't you hear that—and about the Boxer Hall cups?"

"I believe I did," answered Ruth, slowly. "But I did not know then, that my brooch was in that box. Oh, Tom, do you suppose it could be on Crest Island?"

"I don't know, Ruth. The box was empty when we found it, and we think someone located it before we did, and rifled it."

"Oh, Tom, my dear pin! If grandmother hears I've lost it she'll never forgive me—and then her pearls, too; not that I care so much about them,

but this pin was given her by her husband, when they were courting, and she thought the world of it. It was made abroad, of a peculiar pattern, and never could be replaced. It was an heirloom, and she must have thought a lot of me to let me take it.

"Oh, I just can't bear to tell her it is gone! Maybe we can find it. Perhaps it is on the island yet. Maybe it dropped from the box. Tell me; was Phil along when you found the box?"

"Yes, but of course he didn't know that anything of yours was in it."

"Then please don't tell him. He might think I ought to tell grandmother about it—he's so peculiar. And I *will* tell her, if worse comes to worst, and I can't get it back. But, oh, Tom! do you suppose it could be on the island?" and she looked eagerly at him.

"If it's there I'll find it!" declared the tall pitcher, perhaps with more zeal than discretion.

"And don't you tell a soul!"

"I won't," he promised.

"Could you take me with you, Tom? I'd like to help you hunt for it."

"Of course," he said, promptly. "The weather is getting fine now. We'll row over to the island some day, and make a search. But that pin isn't going to be easy to find."

"No, I realize that, Tom. But it will make me

feel better to help look for it. Oh, how careless of that jeweler to leave his things in the boat!"

"It was, in a way, but he could not tell he was going to be summoned away, nor that the flood would come. I feel sorry for him."

"So do I, but—I want my brooch back," and Ruth smiled at Tom. "Now don't say anything, and don't notice my new pin—at least in front of Phil," she stipulated. "If I can get the old one back, then it will be time enough to tell him. Oh, here he comes now, with Madge. Yes, I think the dance will be perfectly fine!" exclaimed Ruth, in loud tones, to change the conversation for the benefit of her brother and Madge. Tom took his cue instantly, and the four were soon engaged in a lively conversation, Ruth, meanwhile, telegraphing signals to Tom with her eyes, while she arranged a bit of her lace collar over the new pin, so that her brother would not notice it.

Plans for the dance being duly made, the boys took a regretful departure. But it was high time, for Miss Philock sent one of the teachers to Ruth and the girls, to tell them that visiting hours were over.

"Until the next time!" called the girls, as the boys walked off.

"And, Tom," whispered Ruth, "don't forget."

"I'll not!" he promised.

"Hello, what's up between you and Sis?" asked Phil, quickly.

"Oh, we're just arranging a little expedition," was the answer of his chum.

But Tom could not carry out his plan of taking the girl to Crest Island the next day. It rained, and baseball practice was ordered in the cage at the gymnasium.

As I do not, in this book, intend to devote much space to baseball at Randall (seeing that I have fully discussed several games in other books of this series), it is sufficient to say that all of our friends played on the 'varsity nine, together with some new students, and that Randall bade fair to win the championship at this time. Which she later did, though not without hard work.

Then came several days of practice in the eight-oared shell, and in the four, the double, and singles, which had, in the meanwhile, been received. There was much enthusiasm, and Mr. Lighton had to press in as coaches some post-graduate students who knew rowing fairly well. But he himself gave his time to the eight. A number of other lads had been tried in it, and among those who had taken the first practice spin several shifts in position were made.

But at last a fine, warm, sunny Spring day came, and Tom, after an early lecture one afternoon, arrayed himself in a costume suitable for rowing, and, with some cushions under his arm, set off for the boathouse.

"Whither away?" asked Phil, as he surveyed his chum.

"Oh, out for a row," and Tom strove to make his voice indifferent.

"With cushions; eh? Want any company?"

"No, thanks, old man. No offense, of course," he hastened to add, "but——"

"None taken!" exclaimed Phil. "Guess I'll go get a girl myself."

As Tom neared the boathouse he met Sid and Frank.

"Want me to pull an oar?" asked the former, as he saw the tall pitcher.

"No. I can manage," and Tom proceeded to get out a light boat.

"I say, old man," put in Frank, with a wink at Sid. "Lend me one of those cushions; will you. I'm going——"

"You're going to get one of your own!" interrupted Tom. "I need these."

"You mean the lady does," added Sid, with a laugh. "Go on, you old deserter. We'll be going out in the shell, later."

"Will you?" exclaimed Tom. "I wonder if I'd better—Oh, go and be hanged to you!" he added. "I'll get practice enough," and he got into the boat and rowed away.

"Wonder where he's going?" spoke Frank.

"Give it up," replied Sid. "Let's find Phil, and get ready for a spin."

Meanwhile Tom made good time to Fairview, and found Ruth awaiting him, he having previously telephoned to her to be in readiness.

"Oh, Tom, I wonder if we will have any luck?" she exclaimed, as they set off, her three girl chums watching her curiously.

"I hope so," he answered, "but, really, I can't hold out much. A brooch is so small, and Crest Island is rather large. But we'll look near the place where the box lodged. The pin may still be there."

It was not a short row to Crest Island, but Tom did not mind it. Indeed he was rather sorry when the place was reached.

He lost no time in proceeding to the spot where he and his chums had picked up the jewelry box. The place seemed just the same, with no evidence of any other visitors. It was rather early for the Summer crowds to come, and none of the several cottages had opened.

The two spent some time in making a careful search, beginning at the point where the wrecked boat had been found, and working along both shores—that is, after a search at the spot where the box had been picked up. But no brooch rewarded their efforts.

"I guess you'll have to wait until the other

things are located," said Tom. "Your pin may be among them."

"Let's walk on a little farther," proposed Ruth. "I want to look at Madge Tyler's cottage."

"Has Madge a cottage here?" asked the lad, in surprise.

"Her people have taken one for the Summer. Madge has invited us girls to spend several weeks with her. Where are you boys going this vacation?"

"To Crest Island!" replied Tom promptly, though, a moment before, he had had not the slightest idea.

"Oh, you're just *saying* that!" challenged Ruth.

"No, really I'm not!" he insisted. "If you girls are going to cottage here, I don't see why we can't camp. Other fellows do."

"Oh, it would be nice, of course," she admitted, as they strolled along. "There's the Tyler place," called Ruth a little later. "I recognize the description. Isn't it lovely?"

"Fine!" agreed Tom. "And that looks like a good camping place," and he indicated a spot not far off.

They soon gave up looking for the lost brooch, which, as Ruth said, was like searching for a needle in a haystack. They strolled some distance on the island, admiring the Summer cottages that would soon be open, and then turned back.

Not far from the spot where Tom and his chums had found the rifled jewelry box Tom saw a sort of shack, or small hut, off between the trees.

"I wonder whose that is?" he ventured. "Let's go take a look."

"It doesn't seem very inviting," returned Ruth. "Perhaps some boatmen live there."

The shack was deserted, but a look through the grimy windows showed that it probably had an occupant, for there were some dishes on a table, some pans on a rusty stove, and, in through another room, could be seen some bunks.

"Probably a caretaker for the cottages," suggested Ruth, as she rested her hand on a window-sill, and idly pulled out some threads that had caught in a splinter. "Rather a strange sort of caretaker," she went in, "who wears silk—see, these are silk threads," and she held up a number, brightly colored.

"Where did you get those?" asked Tom, and the girl started at the strange note in his voice.

"On the window sill," she explained. "Why?"

"Oh—nothing," was his answer, but she noted that he took the threads from her, and carefully put them in a card case. "They might do to make a fishing fly with," he explained, after a pause.

"Oh," she said.

They strolled around to the front door of the building to find it locked.

"There's someone's card," remarked Ruth, as she touched a bit of pasteboard with the toe of her shoe. "Maybe it was on the door, telling at what hour the person who lives here would return."

"Maybe," agreed Tom, stooping to pick it up. "I'll fasten it back again. I wonder who does live here?"

Idly he turned the card over. Then he started in surprise, for the name that met his eyes was:

Reginald Boswell

"Who is it?" asked Ruth. "Anyone I know?"

"I—I fancy not," answered Tom, still staring at the card. "I wonder how that got here?" he mused. "And I wonder who lives in this shack?" and putting the bit of pasteboard in his pocket, he swung around.

"I guess we'd better be getting back," he said to Ruth. "It's getting late, and it's a bit of a pull. I'm sorry we couldn't find your brooch."

"So am I," she admitted, with a sigh. "But it can't be helped. Oh, *how* can I tell grandmother?"

She took Tom's arm, as the way was rough. They had not gone many feet before they heard someone approaching, tramping through the underbrush.

"Who can that be?" asked the girl.

"I don't know—we'll look," whispered Tom.

CHAPTER X

THE GAY HANDKERCHIEF

"WHO are you—what you do here?"

The question was snapped out at Tom and Ruth as they stood near the shack. A man had come to an abrupt halt as he emerged from the bushes and faced them; something of fear, Tom thought, mingled with anger showing on his face. It was this man whom they had heard approaching, a man clad in ordinary garments, yet with an indefinable foreign air about him—an air that was accentuated by his words and inflection. He was dark of skin, swarthy, and when he smiled, which he did a moment after his rather harsh words of greeting, his very white teeth showed beneath a small black moustache. A Spaniard Tom put him down for, or a Mexican. The latter guess proved correct, as the lad learned afterward.

"You come here to—to—pardon, senor, I am forgetting my manners," went on the fellow with a bow, and a sharp glance at Ruth. "You are here perhaps to look at cottages—you and your charming bride."

Ruth drew in her breath sharply, and a rosy glow suffused her face. She did not look at Tom, who chuckled audibly.

"I—I'll never speak to you if you do that again," said the girl, in a low voice.

"Do what?" asked Tom, innocently enough.

"Laugh at—at what he said," and she still blushed, and refused to look up.

"Pardon, senor," went on the man. "No offense, but——"

"That's all right," said Tom easily, master of himself now, but wondering much who the man might be. "We were just looking around. Some friends of ours have a cottage here—the Tylers——"

"Oh, yes. Then you are very welcome. In fact you would be welcome anyhow, as this island is more or less of the public—what you say, I have not the very good English?" and he looked questioningly at them.

"Oh, you mean that it is open to the public."

"That is so, yes, senor, and senorita. You are intersted in my poor abode here—yes?"

"Oh, we were just looking around," explained Tom. "We did peep in. No harm, I hope."

"None at all, senor."

"I'm from Randall," the pitcher went on. "Miss Clinton is from Fairview."

"Oh, you are fellow students then?"

"Not exactly—say, rather—rivals," and Tom looked at Ruth and laughed. The blush had somewhat subsided.

"Ah, I comprehend. I am Rafello Mendez, at your service, senor."

"My name is Parsons," went on Tom. "Sorry I haven't a card," and he thought of the one he had picked up, which he had quickly thrust into his pocket at the sound of approaching footsteps.

"I am what you call the take-care man around here," went on Mendez. "I am the take-care man of the cottages—not all—some."

"The 'take-care' man," murmured Tom. "It sounds like the bugaboo-man."

"Oh, he means the care-taker," exclaimed Ruth. "I understand. You look after the property while the cottagers are away; isn't that it?" and she smiled at the man, who bowed low and answered:

"The senorita has said it. I am the take-care man."

"But I thought old Jake Blasdell had that job," said Tom. "I know he used to be here. But I never knew he had this shack, though I haven't been much on this part of the island."

"Senor Blasdell did was the take-care man," explained Mendez. "But he was took sick, and had to leave, and a friend got me the place. Me, I used to be of the sheep take-care in my country

—Mexico, but I long for this country and I come. I do what you call a business on the edge."

"On the edge?" murmured Tom.

"Yes, senor, on the edge. Or maybe you say on the point. You see he is like this: I am the take-care man for the cottages in place of Senor Blasdell in Winter. In Summer I am the cut-the-grass-man or the garden-man, what you like. Then, besides, in addition, on the edge I sell things in my store which it is unfortunately not open now, or I should show the senorita some pretty things. The store I do on the edge—or maybe on the point, I know not how you say," and he shrugged his shoulders expressively.

"Oh, he means on the side!" cried Ruth. "Don't you understand, Tom? He is a caretaker, and at odd times he sells things to the Summer cottagers."

"The senorita has said it," went on Mendez. "It is on the side, not on the edge—pardon!"

"What do you sell?" asked Tom, curiously.

"Everything. Things from the country. Of a specialty I have the beautiful Mexican push-work, senorita."

"Push-work, that's another new one," said Tom.

"I guess he means Mexican drawn-work," explained Ruth with a smile. "Some of it is very

beautiful. He ought to do a good business here in the Summer."

"I should, if I had all customers like the senorita," said the man with a bow to Ruth, again showing his white teeth in an expansive smile. "I am covered with confusion that I can show her none now. But it is all put away. Perhaps, though, if you wait——"

"No, we must be moving on!" interrupted Tom. "It is getting late. And so you live here all Winter?"

"Yes, senor. This little hut was part of the place where Senor Blasdell used to stay. It was donated to me. I moved it here when I succeeded Senor Blasdell, and added to it. It is very comfortable. I have been over to the main land for some supplies, and when I come back I see you. At first I am suspicious, for which I ask your pardon. You are always welcome, the senor and senorita," and again he bowed.

"Thanks, Mr. Mendez," said Tom, rather carelessly, for somehow he did not like the fellow. "We may see you this Summer. Some of us fellows may camp here."

"Then I shall be pleased to show you some fine Mexican leather work. Perhaps a lariat, spurs, bridles, and some fine silver work for the pretty senoritas, is it not?" and the fellow smiled genially.

"Good-bye!" called Tom. "Come along, Ruth. I'll have to hit up the oars going home or I'll have you so late that you'll get on the bad books of the Ogress."

"Oh, I'm there already," she replied, as she nodded to the Mexican, who bowed low in farewell. "All our crowd is, but we don't mind. Now, Tom, did you really mean what you said about going to camp on Crest Island this Summer?"

"I do, if I can get the other fellows to do it. I know they will, too, for we'll be near our rowing shells, and we can have the best kind of practice."

"Oh, is *that* the only reason you want to come here?" and she looked archly at him.

"Why, isn't that——" he began and then a light dawned on him.

"I guess we wouldn't come if you girls weren't to be here," he added, quickly. "When I tell the fellows that, I know it will cinch matters. Oh, we'll come all right."

They reached their boat, embarked, and Tom was soon sculling away from the island.

"Queer chap—that Mendez," remarked the youth after a bit.

"Isn't he?" agreed Ruth.

"I didn't know those Mexicans were so thrifty," the rower went on. "Being a 'care-

take' man and doing Mexican 'push-work' on the 'edge'. Pretty good; eh?"

"Yes," laughed Ruth. "I can see where we girls spend a great deal of our time this Summer."

"So can I," declared her companion, boldly. "With us fellows."

"Oh, you're not at all conceited; are you?"

"I didn't know it," went on Tom, tantalizingly. "But say, do you know I didn't much like that fellow, for all his fine airs."

"Why not, pray? I thought him quite polite."

"He was—altogether too polite," murmured the lad, with a little more force than seemed necessary. "I don't like foreigners, anyhow."

"Well, I could forgive anyone, even a foreigner, if I could get back my brooch," sighed Ruth. "I don't know what I'm going to do about it."

"It is too bad," agreed Tom. "Now, Ruth, we won't say anything about what happened today, and if you promise not to tell, I'll whisper a secret."

"Oh, Tom, of course I won't tell—you know that!" and she looked reproachfully at him.

"Of course—I was only joking. Well, we four fellows are trying to do a little detective work, and recover the stolen jewelry."

"You are?"

"Yes, and if we do we may get back your brooch."

"Oh, I hope you do!" and she clapped her hands in spontaneous delight. "Do you think you will, Tom?"

"Hard to tell, Ruth. There aren't many clues to work on. At least there weren't until to-day——"

"Oh, did you find some to-day, Tom? Tell me, I'm so fascinated with detective work! Did you really see some clue that escaped me?"

"Ahem! Detectives never talk about their cases, or tell about their clues!" he exclaimed, with exaggerated gravity.

"Tom Parsons!"

"Well, really, I don't know whether I did find a clue or not, Ruth. I'm going to think about it over night. If you can help me I won't hesitate to call on you."

"Will you, really, Tom? That's good of you. And now I'm afraid you'll have to row a little faster. It *is* getting quite late."

"All right," agreed the lad, as he bent to the oars. As he rowed his thoughts went to the card in his pocket and to the strands of silk from the gay handkerchief.

Fortunately Ruth was not so late that Miss Philock found fault. Tom proved himself a good rower, though after he had said good-bye he took the course easy on the way to Randall.

"Some sculling," he told himself, as he tied up

the boat and, in the dusk of the late Spring evening, walked toward his room. "This ought to stand me in good stead for the eight. My muscles are hardening," and he felt of his biceps. He was in extraordinarily good training from his baseball work.

As he was about to enter the building where he and his chums had their rooms, he saw Boswell approaching. Tom's mind flashed to the card he had picked up at the shack.

"I wonder what he could have been doing there?" the tall pitcher mused. "If Mendez didn't have his store open and his stock ready for sale, how could Bossy have bought any? And, if he didn't go there to buy anything, why did he go at all? I give it up."

There was no time for further speculation just then, as the rich lad, with a nod, addressed Tom.

"Where were you?" he asked with an air of familiarity that Tom rather resented in a Freshman. "We had a fine row in the eight. I'm almost sure of bow, and Lighton may shift me to stroke, or number seven."

"Yes?" questioned Tom indifferently, yet resolving to make a brave struggle not to let this usurper put him out of his place in the boat.

"Sure thing. I'm coming on fine, and I've got a dandy scheme for keeping in trim this Summer."

"Yes?"

"Yes. Our folks are going to take a cottage on Crest Island, and——"

"You are?" and Tom fairly exploded the words.

"Surest thing you know, though it's a beastly slow and unfashionable place. We usually go to the shore. We have one cottage there, and another in the White Mountains, but I persuaded dad to take one at Crest for the Summer, just so I could be near the water here and get familiar with the course we'll row next Fall. Nothing like knowing the course, old man, really."

"No, I suppose not," and Tom's mind was busy with many things. With Boswell on the island, matters might not be so pleasant as he had anticipated.

"That's right. I'm going to get a professional coach, too."

"You are?" Tom's voice was still indifferent, but Boswell did not notice it.

"Sure thing. When I go in for a thing I go in hard, and I'm going into this rowing game for keeps."

"Well, I hope we all do," and Tom tried to be pleasant as he turned away.

"See you later," murmured the Freshman, in a patronizing tone, and, as he turned aside he drew from his pocket a gaudy handkerchief. At the sight of it Tom stared, for it was the same pattern

as the strip of silk found near the looted jewelry box. Tom stared at it intently as the rich lad flourished it.

"By Jove!" suddenly exclaimed Boswell, "I've got that torn handkerchief again," and he held it up, showing where a strip had evidently been ripped from it. "I've got two," he explained, "and this one got torn the other day. I thought I laid it aside, but, in my hurry, I must have grabbed it up."

"How—how'd you tear it?" asked Tom, when he could trust his voice.

"Oh, it caught on a nail down at the boathouse, and a piece was ripped off."

"Why—why couldn't you have it sewed on?" asked Tom.

"What? Carry a mended handkerchief? I guess not. Anyhow the piece fell in the water and floated away. Hope you'll be in the eight next time we practice, though I may get your place."

"Maybe," answered Tom, and he did not take the trouble to designate which clause the word modified.

CHAPTER XI

THE FIRST BREAK

"SAY, where in the name of Diogenes's lantern have you been, Tom?"

"Yes, come in you musty old deserter, and give an account of yourself. You've been away so long that you must have forgotten the countersign."

"It was a girl, fellows—I can smell the perfumery!"

Thus Sid, Phil and Frank greeted the advent of our hero into the common room, soon after he had left Boswell. Tom's brain had been so busy with so many thoughts, after the sight of that torn handkerchief, that he had eaten scarcely any supper, though his appetitie just before that had been of the best.

"Shove over; can't you?" was all Tom said to Phil, who was stretched out on the old sofa.

"Sure I can. What's the matter? Got a grouch!"

"No, but I'm dead tired."

"Be careful how you flop," warned Sid, as he watched with anxiety Tom's preparations to sit down. "That sofa doesn't gain strength with age—it isn't like cheese in that respect."

"Where were you?" asked Phil, as Tom managed to find a resting place without bringing forth from the sofa more than a protesting groan, and a series of squeaks.

"Ruth and I were out for a row," said Tom shortly, knowing that the truth would out sooner or later, and having nothing to conceal.

"Oh, ho!" exclaimed Sid.

"Where'd you go?" asked Phil, with brotherly interest.

"Crest Island. That's what kept me so long. I got her home in good season though, and rowed slow the rest of the way."

"Crest Island!" exclaimed Frank. "Did you find any more clues, Tom?"

The tall pitcher hesitated. He was in two minds about what had taken place that afternoon. Should he tell his chums the secret he thought he had discovered, and get their opinions in working it out? Or should he play a lone hand? A moment's thought convinced him. He would tell all —that is, all save Ruth's secret. That he had no right to divulge.

"Well?" asked Frank, as his chum hesitated. "Did you find anything, Tom?"

"I sure did, fellows," and he tossed on the table the card of Boswell, and the strands of silk.

For a moment no one spoke, and then Sid, picking up the card remarked:

"This looks suspicious, Tom. Did you and Bossy quarrel over a girl, and go to Crest Island to have a duel? It begins to look that way—exchanging cards and all that."

"We didn't exchange cards," said Tom shortly. "I found that card near a shack where a caretaker lives. And, by the way, fellows, we're going to camp on Crest Island this Summer."

"We are?" cried Phil.

"I like the nice, easy way he has of laying out our vacation plans for us," remarked Sid.

"Just as if he was our manager," added Frank.

"Well, I only thought it would be handy if we want to practice rowing," went on Tom, holding back the other reason. "We could get a boat, and drop down to college here every day or so, take out the shell and have a spin. If we want to beat Boxer Hall we've got to do some tall hustling, and practice like all get-out!"

"Oh, I fancy I can practice rowing on Crystal Lake, where our folks intend taking a cottage," said Sid. "No Crest Island for mine!"

"The girls are going to cottage there," went on Tom, with a fine appearance of indifference. "Madge Tyler's folks have a neat little shack

there, and Ruth, Helen and Mabel are going to spend some time with her."

"They are!" cried Frank.

"Why didn't you say so at first?" asked Sid, indignantly.

"I—er—I guess I can fix it to camp there," spoke Phil, just as if he had never intended spending his vacation at any other place.

"Oh, you fellows were so sure you knew your own business that I didn't want to butt in," went on the pitcher. "But, boys, what do you think of that?" and he indicated the card and silk.

"It's the same material," spoke Frank after a bit, as he compared the shreds Tom had pulled from the window-sill of the shack on the island, with the torn strip found near the looted jewelry box.

"And what would you say if I told you that Bossy had a handkerchief of that same pattern, with a strip torn off?" asked Tom, slowly.

"Has he?" asked Frank, looking sharply at his chum.

"He has."

"Then, by crimps! He's the fellow who has the cups and jewelry!" cried Sid.

"Go easy," advised Phil. "That's the worst of you—always jumping to conclusions."

"And why shouldn't I, when I can land on 'em

as easily as I can on this one? Isn't it as plain as can be?"

"Not altogether. We'd make fine specimens of ourselves if we went and accused him on this evidence. You say, Tom, that you found this card near the Mexican's shack?"

"Yes. And the shreds of silk there, too. It looks to me as if Bossy had been there to buy a handkerchief. Two of 'em, if we're to believe him. The Mexican probably has them as well as his 'push-work' as he calls it," and he told all the circumstances of the visit to the island, omitting only the search for Ruth's brooch.

"I guess that part is right," admitted Frank. "I mean about Bossy going there to buy one of these gay handkerchiefs. But just because he did doesn't make him guilty. In fact, what object would he have in taking some trophy cups that he could get very little for if they were melted up, and nothing for, if he tried to sell them as they were? No one would buy them, for on the face of them they show what they are. Some were engraved with the Boxer Hall fellows' names. And the other jewelry wasn't so very valuable. Bossy wouldn't have any object in taking that. He's got more money now, than is good for him."

"He might have been gambling, and gotten short of cash, and been afraid of asking his folks," suggested Sid, remembering an ordeal he had gone

through in having a relative under similar circumstances, as I related in "Batting to Win."

"I don't believe it," declared Frank. "To my mind I'd sooner suspect this Mendez. He seems a fishy sort of character."

"Oh, I think he's straight," declared Tom. "I made some inquiries about him while I was having grub. It seems some of the fellows here have been buying stuff of him—last year when he was traveling around the country. He bears a good reputation, and Hendell's father, who owns part of Crest Island, was telling me that the property owners looked up his record well before they let him succeed old Jake Blasdell as caretaker."

"Hum!" mused Frank. "It doesn't look as easy as it did at first, in spite of these clues, Tom."

"That's right. Say, I'm not as much of a detective as I thought. I wonder if that jeweler could be double-crossing us?"

"What do you mean?" asked Sid.

"I mean could he have lost the box of jewelry overboard before his boat was carried away by the flood? If he did, he could make up the story that he left it in the locker, and that someone else got it when the boat was wrecked."

"That's possible, though not probable," admitted Frank. "Fellows, my advice is that we put these things away, and forget all about them to-night. In the morning we may see matters

clearer. I've got to do some boning anyhow. Put 'em away, Tom."

Soon only the ticking of the fussy, little alarm clock was heard, mingled with the rattle of paper as books were leafed or as the lads wrote out their lessons. Even the clock stopped after a bit, and the sudden silence was so startling that Phil exclaimed:

"She's run down! Hope nothing's the matter with her," and he picked up the timepiece with an anxious face.

"Probably got toothpickitis," suggested Tom. "Give it a shake."

Phil did so, with the result that a piece of toothpick did fall out, and then the clock went on ticking again.

"That's better," sighed Phil, though often he had objected to the incessant noise. "It would be like loosing an old friend if that went back on us."

He settled into the depths of one of the old armchairs, Sid being in another, while Frank, who had succeeded to the sofa stretched out luxuriously on that, having ousted Tom, who, on a stool drawn up to the table, was making an ancient war map that was to be used in class the next day.

Morning brought no clearer view to the puzzling problem of the clues to the missing jewelry, and, having all agreed to keep silent about the matter, the lads laid aside the articles and hurried

to chapel. In the several days that followed nothing new in that line developed.

There came several baseball contests, in which Tom and his chums distinguished themselves. The long vacation was approaching, and more or less "boning" had to be done if the lads intended to pass their examinations. All these things, with the rowing practice, kept them busy so that Tom, as was the case with the others, had little chance to see the girls.

The other second-hand rowing craft were made good use of, and those who were to go in the four were practically picked. So were the singles and doubles, though of course a change might be made in the Fall, when new material would come to Randall.

All eyes, and most of the interest, however, was on and in the eight. On this Randall built her hopes of becoming champion of the river and lake league. Though when word came of the fast time made by Boxer Hall and Fairview in their practice spins, there were doubtful shakes of the head, for Randall was nowhere near as good.

Then came the annual Boxer Hall-Fairview races. It was about an even thing between the two colleges, until it came time for the eight-oared contest. There was even a tub race, and the boys at Randall decided to have one when it came time for them to take part in the regatta.

But Boxer won the eight with ease over Fairview, and when Mr. Lighton, who with most of those who had practiced in Randall's big shell, witnessed the exciting finish, he shook his head.

"We've got to do some tall hustling," he remarked, "and make some changes. I'll start in on them to-morrow."

There was a larger number than usual at practice on Sunny River the next day. All Randall seemed to be at the boathouse. Adjoining the old one a start had already been made on erecting the new structure, presented by the alumni. Word had been received that the new shells would be ready in ample time for the Fall races.

"Young men!" exclaimed Coach Lighton, as the eight was slipped into the water, "I'm going to make some radical changes in the crew, and I want none of you to feel sore, because, you know, it is for the good of the college. We have not been rowing well, of late, and there are several faults to correct. The boat hangs a bit, and is a trifle heavy by the stern. She drags. I know one reason for this, it is my own weight, and so I am going to suggest that you now try one of yourselves as coxswain. I am a little too 'beefy" for the place.

"Jerry Jackson, you take the tiller ropes. You've had more practice than any of the others, and you're too light to hope to be at the oars."

"All right," agreed Jerry, cheerfully. After all it was an honor to steer the eight.

"Simpson, you'll stay at stroke, and, Parsons, I'm going to send you back a bit. No offence, but you're not quite quick enough in picking up the stroke. I think it's your baseball arm that's at fault. Molloy, you take Parsons' place, and Tom will go number three. From three, Henderson will go to bow. He's about the right weight for there when we get Jackson in as coxswain. And, Jerry, you'll want to shift your seat a bit aft, to make up for the extra weight they've been carrying in me. That will make a good change, I think."

There was some murmuring over the changes, and obviously nearly all were pleased. Molloy especially, for he had been fretting lest he be kept out of the eight. As for Tom he was rather glad, on the whole, that he did not have the responsibility of picking up Frank's stroke, for it was a responsibility, and it was telling on him. He had begun to realize that his baseball pitching had made him a bit awkward in one arm.

"Say, where do I come in?" suddenly asked Boswell. "I was at bow, and now—I'm nowhere, Mr. Lighton."

"I'll work you in another crew, Boswell," said the coach, sharply.

"But I want to be in the varsity."

"This isn't the varsity any more than any other collection of eight rowers is. The varsity isn't picked yet, and won't be until the Fall."

"Well, this looks very much like the varsity to me," sneered Boswell. "All the fellows in it are on the varsity nine——"

"That'll do you!" said the coach, snappily.

"Then I'm not to row at bow?"

"Not in this eight."

"Then I don't row at all!" and, with a fierce glance at the selected rowers, the rich lad turned sharply and walked off to the dressing rooms.

"The first break," murmured Tom.

"Take your places," spoke the coach, quietly. "I'm going to follow you in the launch. Jackson, make 'em do as you tell 'em!"

CHAPTER XII

A FRIENDLY BRUSH

THERE was a small motor-boat, the property of the rowing association at Randall, having been acquired since the new interest in racing, and several times Mr. Lighton had used it to coach the lads in the fours, singles or doubles, running alongside of them. He now proposed to make use of it to coach the eight, since this was the first time (save for a few practice runs of short length) that he had not acted as coxswain. In the latter tries Jerry Jackson had steered, and, as he owned a motor-boat of his own, which he ran every Summer, he was an apt pupil.

Little was said of the changes made, until the shell was well out in the river, and then Phil, who was, in the new arrangement, next to Tom, remarked:

"How do you like it, and what do you think of it?"

"I think Bossy was a calf to show his temper that way, and I like it here better than in the stern.

I can row better when I don't have to worry about picking up Frank's stroke."

"Say, but he's a peach at it!" exclaimed Sid, admiringly, from his place at bow oar.

"Silence in the bows!" came the sharp command of Jerry Jackson.

"Listen to him," spoke Bricktop, who was at number seven.

"That won't do, boys!" came the sharp voice of the coach, as he ran his little launch up alongside. "If you're not going to accord to Jackson, while he is in the position of coxswain, the same respect you gave me, you might as well give up rowing now and for all. You can't talk and row. You need too much breath for the latter. So if you want to talk, and gibe the coxswain, then the place for you is on shore."

"Right!" exclaimed Sid. "I'll be good."

"Same here," came from Tom.

"I beg your pardon, coxswain," said Phil.

Bricktop Molloy, grinning while the sweat ran down from his forehead, outlined in red hair, into his eyes, whispered:

"What you say, goes!"

And then Bricktop, being as loyal a Randallite as there was, proceeded to row as he had never before, while Frank set a killing stroke. The little lesson was not wasted.

Running along in the launch, by means of which

he could keep close to the shell, Mr. Lighton gave valuable advice. He could do it to better advantage now that he was not in the boat.

"Cut 'em down some," advised the coach, after Frank's little spurt. "About twenty-eight a minute will do now. We'll try a ten-mile bit to-day."

Some of the lads felt their hearts sink at this. Eight had been the limit so far, but they realized that they were in for a grilling, and they stiffened their backs to it.

"Row out your strokes," went on the coach. "Use every ounce of strength you have, and remember that your muscular force, applied at the beginning, does ten times the work as if you put it in at the end. Keep together. Get the oars in the water at the same time, and out together.

"Feather a bit higher—the water is rough today and you don't want to splash. Try to imagine you are all a part of one man rowing in a small boat. Make your oars rise and fall together. They're a bit ragged now."

With such good advice did the coach urge on the lads, and they responded nobly. In a short time, though the rowing had gone a bit awkwardly at first, there was a noticeable improvement.

As Mr. Lighton had said, the boat had been a bit heavy aft, and had dragged. With his weight gone, and with a lighter coxswain, and with the other changes, there was great improvement. In-

stead of hanging in the water the shell seemed to glide through it at a steady rate. There was no jerking progress, but a steady onward movement, the perfection of rowing.

"Get a little more into the finish of the stroke!" called the coach at one point. "You must get the beginning of the stroke with the body only, but finish with the arms and shoulders. Send your elbows past your sides. Drop your shoulders, but keep up your heads and chests."

Thus he corrected fault after fault, until on the return from that row not a lad but felt he had made great improvement. They were all grateful for the change, even Tom, who had been shifted from the post of most honor, next to the stroke. Of course, Boswell, who, like Achilles, sulked in his room, could not be expected to be happy.

"It wasn't a fair thing," he declared to his chum, Elwood Pierce. "I ought to have been kept at bow, or they might have made me stroke."

"That's right, old chap," agreed Elwood. "But what can you expect of such beastly rotters? It wouldn't be that way over in Oxford."

Rumor had it that Pierce had tried to enter Oxford, but had failed miserably. He always declared that the English climate did not agree with him.

The Randall eight was within a few miles of

their boathouse when the rowers saw approaching around the bend of the stream the Fairview eight, swinging along at a good pace. Instantly there came into the minds of all the same thought.

Mr. Lighton who was alongside, must have realized it, for he called out:

"I won't mind if you have a brush with them, if they're willing. But don't get too excited or anxious over it."

"Ready!" called Jerry Jackson.

Not get excited! As well tell a racehorse not to gallop when he hears the pit-pat of hoofs behind him. The hearts of all quickened.

On came the Fairview eight out for a final practice spin. Their season was over, but they were keeping in training for the races in the Fall.

"Want a brush?" asked Jerry of Roger Barns, who was coxswain.

"Sure!" came the reply. "And we'll give you a start."

"We don't want it!" snapped Tom. "Even terms or nothing!"

"That's right!" murmured Frank, as he took a tighter grip on his oar.

The two eights were now on even terms. Mr. Lighton, with a final nod of encouragement, steered his craft out of the way.

"Give way, boys!" cried Jerry, as he grasped the tiller lines.

"Show 'em how we row, even if Boxer Hall did beat us!" called Roger.

With eager strokes the lads took up the race, and, though it was but a friendly brush it meant more to Randall than any realized, save those thinly-clad lads in the shell. It was their first chance to see what they could do against a formidable rival.

CHAPTER XIII

THE LONG VACATION

"COME on now, fellows! Hit her up!" exclaimed Jerry Jackson, in a low voice.

"No, not yet!" whispered Frank, as he bent forward in his place at stroke until he was nearer the lad at the tiller ropes. "Feel 'em out first, Jerry. Don't go breaking our hearts in the first mile. We've got a good ways to go in this little race, and the spurt will come toward the end, if I'm not mistaken. It would be pie for them if we rowed ourselves out, and then they would simply spurt past us. They're older hands at it than we are."

"I guess you're right, Frank," admitted Jerry, who took the advice in good part.

He had not been acting as coxswain long enough to feel resentment that his orders were not obeyed. He realized, also, that the lads at the oars had all the work to do, and, as it was not a regular race, when the coxswain had to be the general, it was no more than fair that the ones who had to do the labor should have a voice in saying how it was to be done.

"Wait until we—get into a—good swing. Let us pull at—this stroke—for a while," went on Frank, speaking rather jerkily, and whispering every time his head came close to Jerry, in leaning forward to make his stroke. "Watch 'em, and when—you think we can spurt—then give—the word."

"All right," assented the coxswain. He looked over at the Fairview shell, and noted that Roger Barns, the coxswain, was closely regarding the Randall eight.

"They're sizing us up," thought Jerry. "Well, we may not be such a muchness now, but by Hector! When we start in regular training this Fall, if we don't make 'em sit up and notice which side their tea is buttered on I'm a Dutchman, and that's no wallflower at a dance, either!" and Jerry shut his lips firmly and felt delicately of the tiller lines, shifting the rudder slightly to learn that the shell was in good control. She responded to the lightest touch, being indeed a well-built craft and as light as a feather, though with sufficient stiffness—that quality always hard to get in a frail shell.

The two racing machines were now moving swiftly along, being about on even terms. Now and then, seemingly in response to a signal from their coxswain, the Fairview lads would hang back a bit, allowing the Randall shell to creep up.

Evidently it was a little trick, played with the hope that Randall would spurt, and give her rivals an opportunity to sweep ahead of them in splendid style, thus winning the impromptu race. If such was the intention Randall did not bite at the bait, for Frank, in a few whispered words to Jerry, advised him not to signal for a quicker stroke.

"Say, is this a race or a crocheting party?" grumbled big Dutch Housenlager. "Vat you t'ink, Kindlings."

"I'm thinking that—I'm—getting winded," panted Dan Woodhouse.

"Silence up there!" exclaimed Jerry, sharply. "It isn't a talking match, whatever else it is! You'll get all the race you want pretty soon. We're coming to a good stretch and I think they'll hit it up there. Be ready for the word, fellows."

"Say, boys, he talks; but he won't let us!" complained Bricktop, winking at Jerry.

"That means you!" insisted the coxswain. He glanced ahead. The launch with the coach had speeded off and was some distance up the river now, evidently waiting for the finish of the little brush.

The talk in the Randall eight had been carried on in low tones, for sounds carry wonderfully

clear over water, and the lads, realizing this, did not want their rivals to hear them.

Jerry stole another glance at the Fairview eight, and, unconsciously, probably, nearly every Randall man did likewise. The result was some uneven and ragged rowing, and a bit of splashing.

"Eyes in the boat!" came the sharp command from the little coxswain.

"Oh, you tyrant!" breathed Bricktop Molloy, but his smile took the sting from the words.

An instant later Jerry detected a movement in the rival shell.

"The spurt is coming!" he reasoned. "We must be ready for it!"

He hesitated but an instant, and then, as he noted Roger Barns straighten up slightly in his coxswain seat, and take a fresh grip on the tiller ropes, Jerry called:

"Ready boys! Hit her up. Thirty to the minute!"

At once the Randall shell shot forward almost as though raised from the water, for the oars caught evenly and every man fairly lifted himself from his seat, to urge the craft ahead.

"Come on, now!" cried Jerry. "Keep it up!"

He swayed his body to indicate the time of the stroke, and he was pleased to note that all the lads in the shell were rowing in unison. The blades of the oars dipped well—not too deeply—

and the feathering, while it might have been better, was fair for a raw crew. Jerry stole one look over to the Fairview eight, and noted that he had not been mistaken. They, too, had spurted at the same time. Randall had not been caught napping.

For several minutes this kept up, and Fairview could not seem to shake off her rival, and shoot ahead. Then a command could be heard given in that shell. What it was Jerry could not catch, but he saw the time of the Fairview rowers quicken.

"Can you stand another stroke or two, boys?" he asked in a low voice.

Frank nodded without speaking. Indeed his breath, as well as the breath of his companions, was all needed for the work.

"A little livelier," ordered Jerry, and he added two more strokes to the minute.

Of course the effect was not so great as before, but it told, and Fairview, which had begun creeping ahead, was held in check by Randall.

Another minute passed, and then the superior training and practice of Fairview told. Slowly she forged ahead, and nothing the Randall lads could do could prevent it. They were at their limit now, or at least the limit to which Jerry dared push them. With straining eyes he shot a quick glance across, and noted with despair that

Fairview was a good quarter of a length ahead. Another minute and she was a half.

"One more stroke!" pleaded the coxswain, and Frank nodded desperately. Slowly Randall began creeping up again, but it could not last.

And then came a narrow turn in the river, a rather dangerous place with cross currents.

"Easy all!" called Roger Barns, and his crew ceased rowing. It was a signal that the impromptu race was over.

"Easy all!" commanded Jerry, with a sigh that they had not won. But at that Fairview was only a scant quarter of a length in advance. Randall had been beaten, but not by much.

"Congratulations!" called Roger to his rival steersman. "You're coming on, Randall."

"Oh, we'll beat you in the Fall," retorted Jerry, cheerfully.

"We'd have walked away from you if it hadn't been the tail end of the season," declared Hadfield Spencer, the Fairview stroke. "We're not in training."

"Oh, don't crawl," said the coxswain. "They rowed a good race."

And this was praise indeed, from no mean rival, and from the coxswain of a crew that had given Boxer Hall, the river champions, a hard race.

"Well done, boys! Well done!" exclaimed

Coach Lighton, as he came puffing up in his launch. "You did better than I expected you would. Fairview, we'll be ready for you in the Fall."

"We'll take you on all right," replied Roger Barns, with a genial laugh.

"And you steered exceedingly well, Jackson," went on the coach, as the Fairview shell pulled off. "I was afraid you would spurt too soon, but you held yourself well in."

"I was watching the other fellows," said Jerry.

"That's the way to do," was the comment. "Now take it easy to the float."

There was talk all through Randall that night of the performance of the eight.

"I think we have just the right crew now," confided the coach to Dr. Churchill, when he went to dine with the venerable head of Randall.

"Ah, I am exceedingly glad to hear that. It will be a source of gratification to the alumni who have so generously provided for the racing material. And you say our boys nearly won from Fairview? How many innings did the game go? What was the score, and did Parsons pitch?"

"Ah—er—my dear Doctor,—er—we were talking about the crew," said the coach, delicately.

"Oh, yes, so we were," admitted the good doctor, in some confusion. "I was thinking of football, was I not? And so we have a good crew.

Hum! Very well. I am so occupied with my translations of those Assyrian tablets that I fear my mind wanders at times."

At times! Ah, Dr. Churchill, more often than "at times" did your mind wander! But what of that? It was keen enough on all occasions, though running in various channels, as many an old graduate will testify.

The practice at Randall went on. There were sore hearts, but it could not be helped when the lads who thought they should be picked for the tentative crews, or for the singles, were passed by. For Mr. Lighton was impartial, and insisted on only the best no matter at what cost.

Perhaps sorest of all was Boswell, he who had been displaced from what had come to be regarded as the varsity eight, though, as the coach pointed out, there might be changes in the Fall. Boswell was ordered into what was termed the "second" eight, but refused to go.

"I may not row at all," he said loftily to his crony, Pierce. "Or I may go in the singles."

"I would," suggested the latter. "My word! A man's his own boss in a single."

"I'll think of it," replied Boswell.

Examinations came, with all their grilling and nerve-racking tendencies, and were more or less successfully gotten through with by our friends and their chums. Then came the long vacation.

CHAPTER XIV

OFF FOR CAMP

"See you soon again, old man!"

"Yes, we'll get together in a couple of weeks. I've got to spend some time with the folks."

"I'll write when I have the camp site all arranged for."

"And don't forget to plan for plenty of grub!"

"I want a soft cot, anyhow."

"Say, what about the girls? I suppose there's no doubt about their going to Crest Island?" and Sid Henderson, who asked this question, interpolating it among half a dozen others, as well as amid numerous interjections, looked anxiously at Tom, as the four chums were saying good-bye preparatory to dispersing for the vacation.

"Of course they'll go," declared Tom. "I had a letter from Ruth to-day——"

"You did?" cried Phil. "I'll have to have a little seance with Sis. She writes to you oftener than she does to me, of late. Tom, you rascal,

take care!" and he shook a warning finger at his chum.

"And hark to Siddie, would you!" mocked Frank. "Sid's so anxious about the girls that he won't play if they don't come; will you Siddie?"

"I'll play my fist on your nose, you old allosaurus!" cried Sid, as he made an unsuccessful reach for his tormentor.

Books had been put away in the study of our heroes. The armchairs had been covered with dust-cloths, as had the creaking old sofa; the alarm clock had been wrapped in cotton, and put on the shelf. Its tick would not be heard until September. It would have a vacation, too.

Randall College began to take on a deserted air, but there was still some activity around the boathouse. The shells were to be kept ready for use —the eights, the fours and the singles. For Mr. Lighton had urged all, who could, to come, if only for an occasional spin on the river to keep in condition.

As we know, our friends had arranged to camp on Crest Island, and from there, as they had a boat, they could take a run down to Randall, and get in a four for practice. If they could get four others, and someone to act as cowswain, they would also row in the eight, they told the coach.

"An excellent plan," he declared. "It will

give us a good crew for the eight in the Fall, I'm sure."

"The only drawback about Crest Island," said Phil, "is that Bossy is going there. He'll be an unmitigated nuisance, if I'm any judge of human nature."

"Especially if he does as he says he will, and takes to practicing in a single," added Tom.

"But the island is big enough," added Sid.

"Even if the cottage his folks have taken is near the Tylers'," put in Frank, with a grin.

"Is it?" asked Sid, eagerly.

"It sure is."

"Then he'd better look out!" declared Sid.

"What's the matter? Afraid he'll take your girl?" asked Tom, with a laugh. But Sid did not reply.

Nothing more had been discovered about the missing jewelry, nor had Tom and his chums been able to follow the clues which they had stumbled upon. The torn handkerchief, the empty jewelry box, the shreds of silk, had been put away, together with Boswell's card. Mendez, the Mexican, had been seen around Haddonfield several times since Tom and Ruth had met him on the island, and he seemed to be selling his wares, there being little need of his remaining on the island as caretaker all day. Whenever he met

Tom, he was very polite, but our hero cared no more for the swarthy man than he had at first.

"He's altogether too nice," decided our hero, though he realized this was nothing against the man. Certainly there seemed to be nothing to point suspicion to him, any more than to Boswell, and the four chums did not dare make an untoward move. It was too risky, Frank said.

As for the Boxer Hall lads, though some might have held a faint thought that their Randall rivals were responsible for the loss of the cup trophies, no one said so in that many words. Still many Randallites felt that a grim suspicion hung over the college, caused by the unfortunate fact that Tom and his chums had been first on the ground when the articles were discovered to be gone from the wrecked boat.

"Hang it all!" exclaimed Tom, as he and his chums were about to separate for the vacation, to meet soon again, "I wish we could get on the trail of that stuff, and the man who took it!"

"So do I!" added Frank. "Well, maybe something will turn up this Summer."

As for Ruth, she had successfully kept her secret with Tom. If her girl friends noticed the absence of her old brooch they said nothing.

Mr. Farson, the jeweler, fretted much over his loss, but it did no good. He even increased the reward, to no more purpose. It all remained a

mystery. He did not even know as much as the boys did about the affair, and, for their own reasons, the students kept silent.

Our four heroes dispersed to their homes, to meet warm welcomes there. Then came preparations for going camping on Crest Island. The Tyler cottage was opened by some of the servants and put in shape for Summer occupancy. Madge wrote to Ruth, Mabel and Helen, bidding them get ready to come when she sent word.

Tom spent a week or two at the shore, "recuperating," as he put it, from the hard study incidental to the examinations.

"I guess, more than likely, it's to rest from the hard work of pulling in that shell," said his father, grimly.

Frank Simpson went on a short trip to his beloved California, and Phil and Sid put in two weeks at various Summer resorts.

Finally the time came to go to camp. Tom, who was in charge of most of the arrangements, sent out letters to his chums bidding them assemble at his home, as he was nearest to Randall College.

And, one fine morning, with their baggage gathered, and with their camping paraphernalia sent on ahead, they departed.

"Off for Crest Island, and the mystery!" exclaimed Tom.

"Not so loud!" cautioned Frank.

"Say, rather," interpolated Sid, "off for Crest Island and—the girls!"

"Hark to the lady-killer!" mocked Phil. "Talk about your Beau Brummels!"

"Punch him for me, Tom," besought the badgered one.

CHAPTER XV

THE OLD GRADUATE

"Say, did you think to bring any spoons, Tom?"

"What about the condensed milk?"

"And say, Tom, this isn't a good brand of coffee!"

"What made you get all canned corn? Why didn't you include some beans, Tom?"

"Say, if I've got to eat coffee with my fingers I'm going to quit right now!"

"Look here, Tom! Didn't I say I wanted a soft cot? You've given me one as hard as a board. I won't stand for it!"

You can easily imagine the scene. The boys had arrived in camp, and were just unpacking. The tents—sleeping and dining—had been erected after much labor, and with the aid of Senor Mendez, who courteously offered his services.

"And for the love of the seven wonders of the world, Tom, what made you buy this brand of canned chicken?" demanded Sid, who was opening a case.

Tom Parsons put down the blanket he was taking out of a trunk. He strode to the middle of the tent, put his hands on his hips, surveyed his three chums, and began:

"Say, look here, you fellows! I've done most of the work around this outfit. I saw to it that the baggage didn't go astray when you chaps were trying to flirt with those pretty girls in the train! I ordered all the eats, and most of the other stuff. I got Mendez to give us a hand, though none of you wanted me to. I've looked after everything from A to Z and you fellows have been loafing. And now you jump on me because I didn't get mock-turtle soup instead of mulligatawny. You don't like the kind of coffee, and I suppose you'll faint if you don't have condensed milk.

"Say, don't you want finger bowls? Will you have paper napkins, or just the plain fringed style? Do you want your shaving water hot every morning, and what time shall I have the 'bawth' ready? Are your nails manicured? If not, I guess I can find time to do that. Would you like silk pajamas, or will linen do? And if there's anything more that you confounded dudes want in this camp—just get it yourselves—I'm done! DONE! Do you hear? I'm through!" and, fairly shouting the words Tom stalked out of the tent and went and sat down on a log near the edge of Lake Tonoka.

The other three stared at each other in amazement. The rebellion of their chum had come like a thunderbolt out of a clear sky.

"Er—what did—what did we do?" faltered Sid.

"Did you ever hear the like?" came from Phil.

"He's mad all right—clear through," spoke Frank. "I guess we have been rather piling it on."

"It's the first time I ever knew Tom to act like this," said Phil, soberly.

"He has done a lot of work," put in Sid.

"And we have been finding a deal of fault," added Frank.

"How can we square him?" asked Phil.

"You go out and talk to him, Frank," proposed Sid.

"No, I've got a better scheme than that," came from the Big Californian. "Let's finish slicking up in here ourselves, go on and get grub ourselves, and then invite him in. He'll see we didn't mean all we said, then."

"Good idea," declared Phil.

"We'll do it," agreed Sid.

Thereupon, paying no more attention to the justly sulking lad by the water's edge, the three chums shortly had the sleeping tent in some kind of shape. An oil stove had been brought, and on this some coffee was soon steaming away, while

the appetizing odor of ham and eggs wafted itself over the camp.

Through it all Tom never turned his head, nor did his companions speak to him. He must have heard what was going on, but he never acknowledged it. With merry whistles his chums drove away the suggestion of gloom.

"Grub's ready!" came the announcement of Frank, as he walked over toward Tom. "Wilt your most gracious majesty deign to partake of our humble fare?" and he dropped on one knee, and offered to Tom, on a plate, a slice of bread.

For a moment the tall pitcher held out against the envoy, and then a faint smile broke over his face.

"If you fellows are done finding fault," he said, "I'll come in and help. But I don't like to do all the work, and then have it rubbed in the way you chaps did."

"That's right, we did lay it on a bit thick," admitted Frank, contritely.

"And I got a bit hot under the collar," spoke Tom, confessing in his turn.

"Come on and eat," urged Frank. "The stuff is getting cold. It isn't such bad coffee after all."

"I paid enough for it," retorted Tom.

And thus the little cloud was blown away. Soon all were eating merrily. The meal being finished,

they began to get the cots in shape, for it was drawing on to afternoon.

The boys had two large tents, one for eating, and the other for sleeping in, and lounging during the day. A smaller one served as kitchen and storeroom.

By evening they were in good shape, and accepted an invitation to take supper at one of the cottages, the owner of which with his wife and daughters, had learned that the boys were friends of the Tylers, who had not yet arrived.

"Well, now for a good snooze!" exclaimed Tom, as they got back to their tent that night, having spent a pleasant evening with the Prudens.

"Did you bring any mosquito netting?" asked Phil. "If you didn't I——"

"Silence!" warned Frank. "A certain amount of mosquito bites will do us good—put ginger into us for the rowing game."

"All right—all right!" cried Phil, quickly. "I didn't mean that," and he looked quickly at Tom, fearing a return of the morning outbreak.

"When are the girls coming?" asked Sid, as he began to get ready to turn in.

"What do you care?" asked Tom, quickly. "Didn't I see you trying to hold the hand of that youngest Miss Pruden under the table?"

"Oh, fie!" cried Frank.

"I was not!" cried Sid, indignantly. "She had

lent me her ring, and it was so small I couldn't easily get it off again. She was trying to help me."

"Say, when you tell 'em, tell 'em good and big!" laughed Tom. "'When are the girls coming?' Say, you're a nice one, you are, and——"

Tom ducked in time to avoid the shoe Sid threw at him.

"Easy, fellows," cautioned Phil. "There are other people on the island besides us, and they may want to go to sleep."

"Then make him dry up!" demanded Sid.

"I'll be good," promised Tom. "But when you hold hands don't be afraid to admit it. I——"

The other shoe came in his direction with such poor aim that the candle was knocked over, the lanterns not yet being in service.

"Cheese it!" warned Frank. "You'll have the place on fire. Light a match, somebody."

All began groping about in the dark tent.

"Oh, for the love of tripe!" suddenly exclaimed Tom.

"What's the matter?" asked Phil.

"I stuck my foot in the water bowl!" exclaimed the lad. "It was on the floor. I'm as wet as a duck."

"Serves you right!" declared Sid vindictively.

"'Be good, sweet lad, and let who will be clever,'" misquoted Phil with a chuckle.

But finally order was restored, and our friends fell into a deep sleep.

"Well, what's doing to-day?" asked Sid, after breakfast.

"I vote we take a trip down to college, and see if any of the fellows are there rowing," proposed Frank. "If we can't scare up enough to make the eight, we can take out one of the fours."

"Second the motion," came from Tom, and the others agreed, too.

They rowed down leisurely, being a bit stiff, not only from their unusual exertions in making camp, but also because they were out of practice. But finally Randall was reached, and, to their disappointment, they found only one or two lads there, practicing in the singles. They all declined to take a try in the eight, as they were going in for the sculling races. Anyhow, there would not have been enough for an eight with a coxswain.

"We'll have to take a four," said Tom, with a sigh. "Frank, you'll have to steer, as you can do it better than any of us."

A four-oared shell, as I explained, and as doubtless most of you know, is steered by a mechanical arrangement, worked by the feet of one of the rowers.

Soon the four chums were pulling down the river, gaining in skill each moment, as the memory of what Coach Lighton had said recurred to them.

They rowed a good distance, and then drew up at a private float and got out to stretch their legs. As they were about to put off again, an elderly man, with a pleasant face, approached and asked:

"From Boxer Hall?"

"From Randall," replied Tom.

"Ah, yes, I noticed you rowing in. I think you might improve your stroke a little if you would feather differently. You don't turn your hands quite at the proper time."

"You must be an old oarsman?" said Tom.

"Well, I've been in the game. I used to row at Cornell years ago. Pierson is my name."

"Are you *that* Pierson?" cried Frank, remembering the name as that of one of the best scullers Cornell ever turned out.

"I'm afraid I am," was the smiling answer.

"Say," burst out Sid. "Would you mind watching us a bit, and telling us our mistakes? We're new at it, as you probably noticed," he went on, "and Randall is just getting into the water sports. We want to beat Boxer Hall. Can you give us a few points?"

"Where are you staying?" asked Mr. Pierson.

"On Crest Island—we're camping there."

"So! Well, as it happens, I have friends there, and I have been invited to spend part of the Summere there. If I come I shall be glad to tell you what I know of rowing, and coach you a bit. It

is the best sport in the world!" and Mr. Pierson's eyes sparkled as though he would like to get in the shell himself.

"That will be fine!" exclaimed Tom. "We shall look for you."

They talked a little longer, the old oarsman giving them some good advice about training. Then he bade them good-bye, and walked off up the hill leading from the river.

The boys got in the shell again, intending to row to Randall, and then back to their camp.

As they neared the college float, and noted the activity of the men building the new boathouse, Sid exclaimed:

"Look who's here!"

"Who?" asked Tom.

"Bossy, by all that's tragic! He's just taking out a single shell. I wonder if he's going to the island?"

CHAPTER XVI

THE GIRLS

ROWING on up to the float, the four chums took their shell out of the water just as Boswell got his in. He looked over at them, and nodded in what he evidently meant to be a friendly fashion, but which he succeeded in making only patronizing.

"Out for a row?" he asked, needlessly.

"Just a bit of practice," answered Sid.

"And you're going in for the same thing, I see," added Phil.

"Yes, I've gone a bit stale since I was here last. I just came back to-day, and I thought I'd take a little row before I went up to our cottage on the island."

"He's going there all right, then," murmured Tom.

"Are you fellows in camp yet?" asked Boswell.

"Yes," replied Frank. "We haven't got settled yet, we'll soon be in shape." Then, with an effort, he went on: "Drop in and see us—when you get a chance."

Phil administered an unseen but none the less swift kick to his chum.

"What'd you want to go and do that for?" he asked, in a whisper. It was safe since Boswell was busy rattling the oars in his shell and could not hear distinctly.

"I couldn't do any less," retorted Frank. "It would look pretty raw not to ask him."

"I hope he doesn't accept," murmured Sid, and, the next moment the rich lad replied:

"Thanks, but I don't expect to get much time for calling. I'm going to be pretty busy with my sculling, and I expect a friend or two up. Besides, I never did like a tent. It always seems so musty to me. I much prefer a cottage."

"Thank the kind Fates for that!" murmured Tom.

Boswell got in the shell, and rowed off, rather awkwardly, the four thought, but then they had yet to see themselves row, though, truth to tell, they were becoming more expert every day.

"I'm going to have a professional oarsman coach me," Boswell threw to them over his shoulder as he sculled off. "I expect to be in good trim, soon. As long as you fellows didn't want me in the eight, I'm going to win in the singles, just to show you what I can do."

"We never said we didn't want you in the eight!" declared Frank. "In fact I thought you

did as well at bow as anyone. It was the coach's doings."

"All right," replied Boswell. "It doesn't matter. I rather think I prefer this, on the whole. And I'm going to win, too!" he boasted.

"Good! We hope you do!" exclaimed Tom. Then, to his chums he added: "Come on, let's get back to the island and enjoy it before he starts his monkey business there. I wonder when his cottage opens?"

"I saw a woman and a man working around there to-day, just before we left," volunteered Sid.

"Then Bossy's folks must be coming soon—more's the pity—I mean as far as he is concerned," put in Phil. "His folks may be decent enough, but he's the limit."

"I suppose he and that English pal of his—Pierce—will be drinking tea every afternoon at five o'clock," said Tom. "They'll have their cakes and Young Hyson out on the lawn, and—Oh, 'slush, isn't it fierce! A bally rotter, dontcher-know!'"

"The Knockers Club will please come to order!" exclaimed Frank, in mock seriousness.

"Say, I guess we have been piling it on pretty thick," admitted Tom, with a grin. "Let's get in our old tub, and pull back. It's my turn to rest this trip."

Laughing and joking, with occasional refer-

ences to the proper way to handle an oar, and some talk of the offer of Mr. Pierson to coach them, the lads rowed back to their camp. They spent the next two days in getting the place in better shape.

"For exhibition purposes," Sid explained. "The girls might come to lunch some day."

"Say, he's got girls on the brain!" complained Phil. "Duck him, Tom, you aren't doing anything."

But Sid discretely got out of the way.

A day later the Boswell family arrived at the island. There were several servants—almost too many for the simple cottage—and Mr. and Mrs. Boswell, in addition to their son. It was hard to see from whom the lad inherited his unpleasant mannerisms, for both his parents were of the old-fashioned school of gentlemen and ladies, with exceedingly kind hearts. Boswell had evidently been spoiled, unless he did the spoiling process himself, which was more than likely.

When Mr. Boswell learned that some of his son's college mates were on the island, he paid a formal call on them, and invited them to the cottage. They promised to come—some time.

"When Bossy isn't home, I hope," murmured Sid.

Pierce, Boswell's English chum, arrived that same week, and after that our friends saw little of

the rich lad. He and his friend were generally off together in a boat rowing or fishing.

Then another personage made his appearance, an athletic-looking man, whom Boswell introduced as his "trainer." Then began the instruction in sculling. Tom and the others heard and saw some of it.

"He's teaching him a totally different stroke than we row," said Sid. "I wonder if it can be right?"

"I'll stick to Lighton's method," declared Frank.

"Yes, for it's the same as that used by Mr. Pierson," added Tom. "It's good enough for us."

The Cornell oarsman had paid a visit or two to the lads in their camp, coming from where he was stopping on the mainland, as his friend, whom he expected to visit on the island, had not yet opened his cottage.

Mr. Pierson gave the boys some good advice, and getting into the shell several times, practiced what he preached. He had not forgotten his early skill, and his illustrations were valuable.

"He can pull a good stroke yet," declared Frank, one day, following some spirited instruction and practice. Mr. Pierson had left, promising to devote more time to the boys later on.

"He sure must have been a wonder in his day," declared Tom.

It was one morning just after the lads had finished breakfast, and were getting their camp in shape for the day, preparatory to going for a row, that Tom made a momentous discovery.

He had been to the spring for a pail of water, and, on his return he noticed on the porch of the Tyler cottage a number of trunks and suitcases. Then a flutter of dresses caught his eye, and he heard a chorus of musical laughter.

"The girls have come!" cried Tom, and he raced for his own camp, as he had on a pair of old trousers and a disreputable sweater, and wanted to get in more presentable shape for making them welcome.

"The girls have come!" he cried, springing into the midst of his chums with such force that he spilled half the water. "The girls have come!"

CHAPTER XVII

AT PRACTICE

"Did you see 'em?"

"Are they all there?"

"What about Helen Newton?"

"Say, where's my brown suit?"

"Has anyone seen my purple tie?"

"Give me those shoes, Sid! Who said you could take 'em, anyhow—my best ones?" and Phil fairly upset his chum in order to rescue the footgear that had been taken without his permission.

I presume the reader can understand the meaning of the expressions which open this chapter. They had to do directly with Tom's startling announcement, and who said which or what does not matter. Sufficient to state that Sid, Phil and Frank thus overwhelmed Tom with the above questions.

"I didn't see any of 'em," went on Tom, when he could get his breath. "But I heard her laugh——"

"Heard who laugh?" demanded Phil.

"Your sister."

"I thought you said they *all* came!" reproached Sid.

"So I did, and so they have. Do you think one girl would have four trunks and four suitcases?" asked Tom, in indignant justification.

"They might—I have known of such," said Frank. "But are you sure they're all here?"

"Of course. Didn't I hear 'em all laugh? Anyhow, Madge must be here, or Ruth wouldn't be at the cottage. And if two of 'em are there the other two are, too."

"That's no reason at all," said Phil, firmly. "This will have to be investigated. Where's my clean shirt? I'm going to see my sister!" and he strode into the tent.

"It's the first time Phil was ever so thoughtful of his sister, fellows. I guess we'd better all get togged up a bit," said Frank, and the activities, that had begun when Tom came in with the news (which activities had ceased momentarily while the glad tidings were being confirmed), were again resumed.

"Glad rags," as the lads slangily designated their habiliments, other than the ones in which they worked about the camp, were soon being donned, and a little later the boys were on their way to the Tyler cottage.

"I wonder how long they're going to stay?" said Sid.

"As long as we do, I hope," said Tom. "There they are!"

"All four of 'em, sure enough," added Phil.

"You were a good guesser, Tom, old man."

"Oh, leave it to your Uncle Dudley!" declared Tom, puffing out his chest. "Little Willie knows what he's about."

"Hello, boys!" called Madge Tyler, as she caught sight of the advancing four.

"Welcome to our city," added Ruth, as she threw a kiss to—her brother. At least Tom said so, when they accused him later of intercepting it, and Tom ought to know.

"Glad you're here."

"Isn't this place lovely?"

"Where is your boat?"

"Have you a motor?"

"Are you going to invite us to lunch in the tent?"

These questions and comments were bandied back and forth among the boys and girls, no one caring very much who said what, so glad were they to see each other, and exchange greetings and experiences.

"We girls just came up this morning," explained Madge. "We didn't wait for mother, and father has some tiresome business to look after so he couldn't come. But I just said that Jeanette, our maid, was chaperone enough, and so we came. I guess the man on the boat thought we had baggage enough."

"But he was nice about it," added Ruth.

"Yes, after I gave him a quarter," explained Helen.

"Oh, you dear! Did you really tip him?" asked Madge.

"Certainly—he—er—well, he seemed to expect it," and the boys laughed at her naive explanation.

"Won't you come in?" invited Madge. "It isn't much of a cottage, and we can't even offer you a cup of tea, for we're all out, and I had to send Jeanette for some."

"Don't worry about that," remarked Phil.

"We've got all the food we can eat over at the tent," went on Tom.

All entered the charming little cottage, and the boys told of their experiences since coming to camp, while the girls detailed the happenings of their journey that morning.

A small steamer, making regular trips about the lake, had left them and their baggage at the island, which was beginning to be quite a Summer resort. A new store had recently been built on the place, and provided a variety of articles, including foodstuffs for the cottagers.

"There's a boat or two with this cottage," explained Madge. "We'll have to get them in the water to soak up, I suppose, and then we girls will give you boys some lessons in rowing; won't we, girls?"

"We might try," said Ruth, drily.

"Your boats are in the water, I think," said Sid. "I saw that Mexican 'take-care' man, as he calls himself, at them the other day, caulking up some cracks."

"That's good," retorted Madge. "I know father wrote on to have this done, but I've been so busy, getting ready to come here, that I forgot to ask if it had been attended to. I wish we had a motor-launch, but father is so old-fashioned, if I must say it, that he won't hear of it."

"Haven't you boys a launch?" asked Helen.

"No," replied Tom, "but perhaps we can hire one," and he looked at Ruth, who had been trying to signal him when the Mexican's name was mentioned.

"That's a good idea," declared Phil. "We'll see about it this afternoon."

Then Jeanette, the maid, having come from the store with the tea, the boys took their leave, to allow the girls time to change into more comfortable and camp-like garments, and also to enjoy their beverage.

"We'll see you after lunch," called Phil.

"We'd ask you to stay," spoke Madge, "but really we haven't quite found ourselves yet. Later on——"

"Come on over to our tent," invited Sid.

"No, thank you," laughed the young hostess.

"Some other time. We have to unpack our dresses, or they'll get wrinkled."

The boys thought lunch time would never pass, but it did, though they made a hasty meal of it. Then they hurried back to the cottage, and a little later four pairs of young persons were strolling in four different directions over the beautiful island.

"Oh, Tom!" exclaimed Ruth. "I've been just wild to get you alone for a moment to ask if you've found out anything about my brooch?"

"Not a thing, Ruth, I'm sorry to say. In fact the whole business is at a standstill. We had some suspicions, but they didn't lead anywhere, and we're up against a stone wall so far in the game."

"Well, perhaps something may develop," she said with a sigh. "I hope so, for I'm afraid every day some of my folks will discover that I'm not wearing the brooch. When I went to bid grandmother good-bye I wore a large bow tie, so she couldn't see the place where the pin ought to have been, but wasn't. Isn't it dreadful to be so deceitful?"

"Not at all," Tom hastened to assure her. "It isn't your fault, and, as you say, something may develope."

They strolled on, as did the others, and the afternoon seemed wonderfully short.

I note, in looking back over some pages I have written, that I headed this chapter "At Practice," and really I meant to devote considerable space to detailing the doings of Tom and his chums in the shell, under the guidance of Mr. Pireson. But I find that the girls have taken up such a large proportion of my available space that I have not much left for rowing matters. And, in fact, the boys found themselves in the same predicament. After all, I suppose, it is not an unforgivable crime.

Tom and his chums kept promising themselves, from day to day, after the arrival of the girls, that they would buckle down to hard work in the shell, but each day saw them over at the cottage as early as decency and good manners would allow, and the same thing kept them there as late as possible.

They hired a small gasoline launch, that was continually getting out of order, and stopping out in the middle of the lake. They had to be towed in so frequently that they became very well known. But it was all the more fun.

"There's something about this launch that you don't often find," remarked Frank, one day when they had been drifting helplessly about.

"And it's a good thing you don't," added Tom.

"What I meant," said Frank, "was that it never gets monotonous. The same thing never happens twice."

"I should say not," declared Sid. "Every-

thing on the old tub has broken one time or another, from the old cups to the piston rings, and everything from the spark coil to the batteries has given out! Monotonous? I should say nixy!"

Yet the boys did practice. Frank grew desperate when a week had gone by without their getting into the shell, and he spoke to such advantage, dwelling on the necessity of keeping in condition, that the others agreed with him. So they left the girls to their own devices one morning, and rowed down to college.

They found quite a number of their chums there, and considerable practice was going on. Mr. Lighton had paid one of his flying visits and was giving the lads some instruction.

Our friends told him of Mr. Pierson's offer, and the coach said:

"You could not do better, boys, than to follow his advice. I wish we could get him to come to Randall in the Fall."

"Maybe he will," suggested Sid. "We'll ask him."

Mr. Lighton said he had word from Bricktop Molloy, and one or two of the others, that they were getting in some practice during the Summer vacation.

"I hope we have a good eight when college opens again," he concluded, as Tom and his chums rowed off in the four-oared shell.

Mr. Pierson was staying on the island now, and for the next few days he was with the boys considerably, giving them valuable advice. They kept at practice, setting aside certain hours for it, and manfully withstanding the temptation of going off on little excursions with the girls.

So far as solving the mystery of the missing jewelry was concerned, no progress was made, though the boys talked about it often. The faint suspicions against the Mexican and Boswell were still maintained, but that was all.

As for Boswell, he and his English friend and his "trainer," as he called the athlete, kept pretty much to themselves. Mendez was the same over-polite Mexican as before. He opened his store, and did a good business, our friends patronizing him to some extent—partly to get a look inside his place. But, though their eyes were used to the best advantage, they saw nothing that would aid them in their quest.

"But I'll get Ruth's brooch back yet!" declared Tom, to himself.

CHAPTER XVIII

"SENOR BOSWELL"

"SHOULDERS back a little more! Heads up! Don't feather quite so high. That's all right to do when there are little choppy waves, that would cause splashing, but in calm water the lower you feather the less you have to raise the spoon of the oar. Of course don't do any 'riffling.' That holds back the boat. When I see you in an eight, with a coxswain, so you don't have to think about steering, I can tell better how you will do."

This was Mr. Pierson giving some coaching advice to the four boys, who were out in the shell. He was following them in the launch owned by his friend, at whose cottage he was visiting.

"I'm wondering if I'll have wind enough for a four-mile race, pulling even thirty to the minute?" said Sid.

"And we may have to hit it up to thirty-two or three," put in Tom.

"Don't worry about those things now," advised the Cornell graduate. "They will work themselves out when you get in training. Of course

you're not training now, and that makes a difference. My chief anxiety at present is to get you in the way of taking the proper stroke, to teach you how to sit, how to slide in the moving seats, how to bring your whole weight where it will do the most good, and how to depend on the toe stretchers. Your wind will take care of itself when you get down to hard practice. If it doesn't —well, you can't row in an eight, that's all."

The old graduate glanced sharply at the lads, and, noting a look of anxiety on their faces, he hastened to add:

"But I'm sure it will come out all right. Don't think about it. Now then, hit up the stroke a little."

And so he accompanied them over the course, giving them advice almost invaluable, which they could have obtained in no other way. The boys appreciated it deeply.

Camp and cottage life on Crest Island was endless delight to the boys, even with the hard practice they put in occasionally. I say "occasionally" advisedly, for they did not forget, nor did Mr. Lighton or Mr. Pierson want them to forget, that they were on their vacations. Truth to tell, the girls took much of the time of our heroes. And this was as it should be. We can never be young but once, if I may be pardoned that bit of philoso-

phy in a story book—a bit that is not original by any means.

"Well, thank our lucky stars, we don't have to grind away in the boat to-day!" exclaimed Sid one morning, as he got up ahead of the others, for it was his return to prepare breakfast.

"That's right," called Tom, in a sleepy voice from his cot, as he turned over luxuriously amid the scanty coverings, for the night had been warm. "I vote we get the launch in running order, if that's possible, and take the girls off for a picnic."

"Second the motion," exclaimed Sid, "with the amendment that the girls provide, and put up, the lunch."

"We'll pay for it, if they put it up," said Frank.

"That's better," remarked Phil. "I'll tip Sis off, and I guess they'll do it."

Behold then, a little later, the eight young persons, lively and gay, in the wheezy and uncertain launch, voyaging over the lake toward a distant dell of which they knew, on the mainland, where they proposed to picnic for the day.

They ate the lunch which the girls had put up in dainty fashion, sitting on a broad, flat rock near the edge of the lake, with the wind rustling in the trees overhead, and the birds flitting here and there.

"Isn't it glorious here?" mused Sid.

"Gorgeous!" declared Madge. "It's just a perfect day."

"'O, perfect day!'" began Phil.

"Cut out the poetry," interrupted Tom. "There's a little snake crawling toward you, old man."

"Oh!" screamed four shrill voices, and there was a hasty scramble, until the snake was discovered to be only a tiny lizard, which the girls declared to be "just as bad."

Then came saunterings two-by-two off in woodland glades until it was time to think regretfully of returning to the island, for the shadows were lengthening.

It was just as they were about to start off in the little gasoline launch, which, strange to say, had been behaving wonderfully well that day, that they saw Mendez, the Mexican, rowing toward them in a small boat. He seemed in much of a hurry.

"Senors and senoritas!" he hailed them. "Wait a moment, I pray of you."

"Gracious—I hope nothing has happened at home!" exclaimed Madge Tyler, for her mother was not at the cottage.

"Perhaps it's a telegram for some of us," suggested Ruth. "Oh, dear, I do hope I don't have to go home."

They all regarded the approaching Mexican curiously.

"Pardon," he began with a smile that showed all his white teeth, "but I seek Senor Boswell. Is he with you?"

"With us? No," answered Tom. "He doesn't train in with our crowd."

"Most likely he's having tea on the lawn, and talking about 'beastly rotters,'" suggested Sid.

"Oh, Sid!" exclaimed Ruth. "He isn't such a bad sort."

"Oh, do you know him?" asked Tom, quickly.

"He called one evening," explained Madge, while just the faintest suggestion of a blush suffused her pretty face. "He and Mr. Pierce."

"They did!" exclaimed Phil, looking keenly at his sister.

"Hush!" she exclaimed. "Silly boy. Don't make a scene!"

"Senor Boswell—is he not here?" went on the Mexican, and there was anxiety in his voice. "I was inform that he come off on a boat, and in this direction. I see your launch moored here, and I am of the belief, perhaps, that he may be here. Is it not?" and again he smiled.

"No, he isn't here, and we haven't seen him," said Tom.

"Pardon, senors and senoritas," said the Mexican, bowing as well as he could in his small boat. "I shall look farther. I have the honor to bid

you good afternoon," and he rowed away, up the lake.

"What do you suppose he wanted of Boswell in such a hurry?" asked Sid in a low voice of Tom, as they were getting in the launch.

"Give it up," was the answer, but Tom was doing some hard thinking just about that time.

CHAPTER XIX

JEALOUSY

"We've got to do some pulling to-morrow," remarked Frank, as they rowed toward the island. "Mr. Pierson said he'd show us a new wrinkle or two."

"And we want to begin to hit up the speed a bit," added Tom.

"That's right," agreed Phil, who was fussing with the motor, that missed every now and then.

"But say!" exclaimed Sid. "I thought we were going to take the girls down to watch some of the other fellows row opposite college to-morrow?" and there was a rueful look on his face.

"Well, I know we did speak of that," said Tom, "but——"

"The implied invitation is declined with thanks," broke in Ruth. "We girls simply have to do some house-cleaning to-morrow. The cottage is a perfect sight, and it's sweet of Madge not to have found fault before."

"Oh, it's nothing of the sort!" declared the

young and pretty hostess. "Don't decline on that account."

"No, don't!" besought Sid.

"But we really must stay home," declared Mabel. "I know we have upset things terribly, and tossed our belongings about until I'm sure that poor maid must be distracted picking things up. Besides, Mr. Tyler is coming up to-morrow and I know your mother will want the place in some sort of decent shape, Madge. We must stay and help."

"Indeed, yes," echoed Helen Newton.

"Too bad!" declared Phil.

"Besides, it's all you boys' fault that it is so upset," went on Ruth.

"How do you make that out?" demanded Tom.

"Why you're always coming along, begging us to go out with you, and you're always in such a hurry that we can't wait to pick up things. So there!"

"Any reason, even if it's a poor one," remarked Frank, drily.

They glided along for some time, and then the motor suddenly stopped.

"Now what's wrong?" asked Frank.

"I knew something would happen if Phil didn't stop monkeying with it," declared Tom.

"Monkey yourself!" retorted the lad who had been acting as engineer. "All I did was to screw

the spark plug in a bit tighter, and shut the petcock."

"Then you probably cracked the porcelain on the spark plug, and there's a short circuit," spoke Frank. "Here, let me take a look, and see what the trouble is," and as Frank had been successful in times past, when the others had failed, they made room for him at the motor.

He looked it over a moment, and then, seeing that the switch was on, gave the flywheel a couple of turns. There was only an apologetic wheeze.

"He knows so much about motors," sarcastically murmured Tom to Ruth.

"He knows enough to turn on the gasoline, at any rate, and not try to run the motor with what's in the carburetor," snapped back Frank, as he opened the cock in the pipe leading from the tank in the bow. "Who started this motor, anyhow?"

"I did," confessed Tom, the tables thus being turned against him.

"Next time turn on the gas," repeated Frank. "It's one of the first things to do in running a motor-boat, sonny. You may write the word gasoline twenty-five times before you go to sleep tonight," and all joined in the laugh against poor Tom.

"Huh! I supposed it was always kept turned on," he said in defense.

"The carburetor leaks a little, so I always shut

the gas off at the tank," explained Sid. "I guess I forgot to mention it."

"And I can easily guess why," spoke Frank, with a significant glance at the pretty girl beside whom his chum was sitting.

"Well, it's another little wrinkle—one of a number—we've learned about the boat," spoke Tom, when they were once more under way.

"All good things have to come to and end, I suppose," remarked Sid, when they had landed and were bidding the girls good-bye. "But we hope there'll be more excursions."

"You can always ask us—at least as long as we're here," said Mabel. "Though I'm afraid we'll have to go next week. It's been perfectly lovely of Madge to keep us this long——"

"Indeed you're not going so soon!" declared the hostess. "Why, you haven't been here any time at all yet, and when you do go I'll be so lonesome——"

"So will we!" chorused the lads. "Don't go," and the girls laughingly promised to stay as long as possible.

True to their determination, the lads went out in the four-oared shell the next day, with Mr. Pierson in the launch to coach them. He put them through some stiff practice, and increased the stroke to a number where the boys were almost on the point of protesting. But they realized that

they needed it, though they were glad to stop when the word was given.

"A few days of that will put you in the way of bettering your wind," said the old college graduate, with a whimsical smile. I have spoken of him as an "old" graduate, but, in point of fact he was not at all an elderly man. I merely used "old" in a comparative sense.

"I wonder what's the matter with Boswell?" ventured Sid, as they rowed the shell back to the college float, and prepared to motor back in the launch. "I haven't seen him out practicing today."

"That's right," agreed Tom. "And say, did it strike any of you as queer the way that Mexican was looking for him?"

"Somewhat," admitted Frank.

"There must be something between them," went on Tom. "I wonder if, after all, it can have anything to do with the missing jewelry?"

"What makes you think so?" asked Phil.

"I don't know that I do, very definitely. But that Mendez was certainly anxious to find Bossy, though for what reason I can't even guess. Wouldn't it be queer if Bossy had found those cups and other things, and gotten rid of 'em through the Mexican, after he found he had carried the joke too far?"

"I believe you," replied Frank. "But it's

pretty far-fetched to my way of thinking. I'd hate to believe that any Randall man would be guilty of such a thing."

"So would I," added Phil.

"Oh, well, I only mentioned it as a supposition," said Tom, in self-defense. "Anyhow, Bossy sure does practice hard in his single. I guess that trainer of his knows his business."

"Yes, he's a good trainer," admitted Frank. "I've heard of him, but it's pretty near the limit for a fellow to have a private trainer. It's too much like putting on lugs."

"It is that," said Phil. "And I suppose, when we get back in the Fall, about all we'll hear will be Bossy and his shell."

"I wonder if he has a chance to win?" asked Tom. "They have some expert scullers at Boxer Hall."

"Well, they ought to have; look how long they've been at it," retorted Frank.

"I'll be rather glad to get back to college again," went on the tall pitcher. "This loafing life is good, but I'm anxious to get in the eight."

"So am I," came from Sid, "but it's sport here," and he looked toward the island they were approaching, probably thinking of the girls. So far the four chums had not been able to get five others, one the coxswain, with them so that they could row in the eight-oared shell. But the four gave them

sufficient practice, Mr. Pierson thought, since, after all, it was a matter of the stroke, and could be acquired in one craft as well as in another.

Meanwhile, a little scene was taking place near the Tyler cottage, that, had our friends beheld it—or, rather one of our friends in particular—might have caused some trouble.

The girls were kept busy with some light housework, helping Mrs. Tyler and the maid, after the boys left. Then, having put their rooms in order they attired themselves in fresh gowns and walked off toward the water. Near the cottage Boswell occupied, the four young ladies met the rich lad and his English chum. The two were out for a walk, and, as the youths stopped to chat for a moment with Madge, whom they had met formally, she could do no less than halt a moment with the other girls, who had been introduced to the lads.

"Come down and I'll take you out in my launch," invited Boswell. "I've just got a new one, and it's quite fast."

"Oh, come on!" cried Ruth, impulsively. "That one Phil and the boys have is so slow, and something is always happening to it."

"My word! I should say so!" laughed Pierce.

"But we declined an invitation to go out with—our boys," said Mabel Harrison, in a low voice."

"Oh, well," spoke Ruth. "They had to go to

practice anyhow, and we won't be long. Come on."

It was a delightful day, and the invitation was hard to resist. Behold then, as a Frenchman would say, behold then, a little later, the four pretty girls in Boswell's launch, with himself and Pierce making themselves as agreeable as they knew how. And to give them their due, they knew how to interest girls, and were deferential and polite in their demeanor.

"Your pin is coming unfastened," remarked Boswell to Ruth, as they were speeding along, and he motioned to a bit of lace at her throat—lace caught up with a simple gold bar clasp.

"Oh, thank you," she answered, as she fastened it, and then she blushed, and was angry at herself for doing it.

"Where is that lovely old-fashioned brooch you used to wear?" asked Madge, looking at her chum.

"Oh—er—I wouldn't wear it out in a boat, anyhow," said Ruth, blushing redder than before. "I—I might lose it. See, wasn't that a fish that jumped over there!" and she pointed to the left, glad of a chance to change the subject.

"Yes, and a jolly big fellow, too!" declared Pierce. "Why can't we get up a fishing party, and take you girls?" he asked. "My word, it would be jolly sport! We could take our lunch,

and have tea in the woods, a regular outing, dontcherknow."

"That's the ticket!" exclaimed Boswell. "Will you girls come?" and he looked particularly at Ruth.

"I don't know," she replied and then, in the spirit of mischief, she added: "I'll ask my brother. Perhaps he'd like to come. He is a good fisherman."

"Oh—er—it wasn't so much about the fish that I was thinking," spoke Pierce, a bit dismayed, and then he dropped the subject.

"Are you fond of old-fashioned jewelry?" asked Boswell, in a low voice to Ruth. "I mean old brooches and the like?"

"Yes—why?" asked Ruth rather startled.

"Oh, I only just wanted to know. I'm a bit that way myself. My mother has a very old brooch that I gave her. I mean it was old when I came across it and bought it. I'll borrow it some day and let you see it."

Ruth murmured a polite rejoinder, scarcely knowing what she did say, and then, as one of the lake steamers approached rather dangerously close to the launch, there was a moment of excitement aboard both craft, for Pierce, who should have been steering, had neglected it for the agreeable task of being polite to Mabel Harrison.

But nothing more than a scare resulted. When

matters had quieted down, the talk turned into another channel, and Ruth was glad to keep it there.

The topic of the brooch, she thought, was a rather dangerous one for her, since she wanted to keep from her friends, and especially from Tom and her folks, the knowledge of the missing pin. She was hoping against hope that it would be found. She wondered what Boswell meant by his reference, but did not dare ask him.

The ride was a pleasant one, though the girls—all of them—felt that they had, perhaps, been just a bit mean toward their boy chums. Still, as Madge had said, Tom and his friends did have practice.

"We better go back now," said Ruth, after a bit. "It has been delightful, though."

"And the engine didn't break down once," added Helen.

"Oh I don't get things that break," spoke Boswell, with an air of pride. "But you don't want to go in so soon; do you?"

"We must," insisted Madge, and, rather against their wishes, the boys turned back.

As Fate would have it, the new launch got to the Boswell dock just as the craft containing Tom and his chums hove in sight. Their wheezy boat puffed slowly along, and as it was steered in toward the dock they had improvised near their

tent, the boys saw Boswell and his chum helping the girls out. Then Boswell walked alongside Ruth, seeming to be in earnest conversation with her.

"Say, would you look at that!" cried Sid. "The girls were out with those chaps!"

"And after refusing to come with us!" went on Frank.

"I like their nerve!" declared Phil.

Tom said nothing, but there came a queer look in his eyes.

"Well, I suppose we're not the only fellows on the island," spoke Frank, philosophically. "We couldn't expect them to stay in, waiting for us to come back, on such a fine day as this."

"But they said they were going to be busy," objected Sid.

"Oh, well, I guess what they had to do could be dropped and picked up again, when there was a launch ride in the offing," went on the Big Californian. "We'll call around after supper and take 'em out. There's going to be a glorious moon."

"Fine!" cried Sid. But when evening came, and the others attired themselves more or less gaily, ready for a call, Tom did not doff his old garments.

"What's the matter, sport; aren't you coming?" asked Sid.

"Nope."

"Why not? Ruth won't want to go unless you're there."

"I don't care. I'm not going. I don't feel like it."

"Oh, come on."

"Nope."

"What shall I tell her?" asked Sid, looking to see that Phil and Frank had gone on ahead.

"Nothing," and Tom began filling a lantern, this being one of his duties that week.

Sid stood regarding his chum for a moment, and then without a word, but with a suggestive shrug of his shoulders, went out.

CHAPTER XX

A STRANGE CONFERENCE

"You missed it, old man; we had a dandy time," remarked Frank, when he, together with Sid and Phil, drifted into the sleeping tent some time later.

"That's right, Tom," added Sid. "The cake was good."

"And the lemonade, too," added Phil.

"Um!" sleepily grunted Tom. Or was he only simulating sleep?

"And the girls were jolly," went on Frank.

"And Ruth wanted to know why you hadn't come," proceeded Sid, keeping up the chorus of description.

"Oh, let me go to sleep," growled Tom.

"Bossy and his chum blew in, but they didn't stay long," added Phil. "I guess they didn't expect to find us there."

"Was Boswell there?" demanded Tom, sitting up on his cot.

"Sure," retorted Sid, at the same time giving Frank a nudge in the ribs as much as to say: "There's where the shoe pinches."

"I've got a headache," said Tom, only half truthfully. "I guess that row in the hot sun was a little too much for me to-day."

"Can we do anything for you?" asked Frank, trying to make his voice sound anxious.

"No, I'll sleep it off," and turning with his face toward the tent wall, Tom proceeded to slumber—or pretend to.

It was two days after this when Tom and Ruth met. He had studiously avoided calling at the Tyler cottage, though the other boys went over each evening. Tom gave some excuse, and each time Sid and the others came in at night they would remark about the good time they had had.

"You're missing it," declared Phil, winking at his chums. "Boswell is filling in your place fine."

"Was he there again?" snapped Tom.

"Sure thing. He and Sis seem to get on well together, though I don't care for the chap. Still he isn't such a bad sort as I thought at first."

As a matter of fact Boswell had not called since that first evening, but Phil guessed Tom's secret, and wickedly and feloniously egged it on.

"What's the matter, Tom; why haven't you called?" asked Ruth with perfect sincerity when

she and the tall pitcher did meet, following some busy days devoted for the most part by the boys to rowing practice. "I wanted to ask you about something?"

"I—er—I've been busy," he said, trying to make himself believe that. Ruth didn't. "Besides," he blurted out, with a school-boy mannerism that he hated himself for disclosing, "I thought Mr. Boswell could keep you interested."

"Tom Parsons!" and Ruth's eyes flashed dangerously.

"He seems to be quite a steady caller," he stumbled on, growing more and more confused and uncomfortable. He felt more childish than ever, and I am not saying he was not. "I didn't know whether there'd be room for me and——"

"Tom, I don't think that's fair of you," and Ruth was plainly hurt. "Mr. Boswell has only been over one evening, when the other boys were there, and——"

"Only once?" cried Tom.

"That's all. The same evening of the day when we were out in his launch. I couldn't help talking to him then, and if you think——"

"I don't think anything!" broke in Tom. "I've been a chump. They said he'd been over there every night. Oh, wait until I get hold of your brother!"

"Did Phil say that?"

"He did."

"Then I'll settle with him, too. But, Tom, I wanted to ask if you thought there was any chance of finding my brooch?"

"I don't know, Ruth. It begins to look rather hopeless."

"That's what I thought, and, as long as I'm not going to get it back I may as well admit that it is gone. I can't go on deceiving people this way, even in so small a matter. I suppose it was careless of me to let the clasp get broken in the first place. I put it on in a hurry one day, and strained it. And in the second place, I suppose I ought to have given it to a more reliable jeweler.

"But that Mr. Farson called at the college one day soliciting repair work to do. He said he had some from Boxer Hall, so I thought he was all right, and let him take my pin. I'm sorry now."

"Yes, it is too bad," assented Tom, "but it can't be helped. I don't really believe, Ruth, that there's any use looking on this island for the pin. I have been keeping my eyes open for it, but I'm beginning to think that it's like hunting for the proverbial thimble in the straw pile."

"You mean needle in the haystack."

"Well, it's the same thing. I never can get those proverbs straight. The only hope is that we might, some day, discover who took the things, and your brooch might be recovered. But it's a

pretty slim chance, now that all our clues seemed to have failed."

"That's what I thought. So I guess I'll confess and brave grandmother's wrath. But, oh! I know she'll never leave me her lovely pearls!"

"Maybe someone else will," suggested Tom. "Will you come down to the store and have some soda water? He's got in a fresh lot, I believe."

"I will, Tom, for I'm thirsty enough to drink even the lemon-pop Mr. Richards sells. Come on," and the two walked on, the little cloud that had come between them having blown away. But Ruth said nothing about Boswell's promise to show her his mother's old-fashioned brooch. Perhaps she thought he had forgotten the matter, and, she reasoned, there was no need of awakening Tom's jealousy.

It was after Tom had parted from Ruth, with a promise to call that evening with the other boys, that, walking along the island shore, taking a short cut to the camp, he heard voices coming from the direction of the water. He looked through the screen of bushes, and saw Boswell and the Mexican caretaker, sitting in a boat not far from shore. The college lad was handing Mendez something, and by the sun's rays Tom caught the glitter of gold. At the same time a puff of wind brought their voices plainly to him, the water aiding in carrying the tones.

"Do you think you could get an old-fashioned pin like that?" Boswell was asking. "You know something about jewelry; don't you?"

"Of a surety, senor. But this would be hard to duplicate. It is very old."

"I know, but I want one like that, or as near it as possible. Can't you get one the same place you got that?"

"No, senor, that was the only one there was, and when I sell him to you for your respected mother I regret that I can get no more of him."

"Where did you get that?" asked Boswell, as he took back from the Mexican what Tom could now see was some sort of breastpin.

"Why do you ask, senor?" retorted the man, quickly.

"Oh, nothing special. Why, you act as though you thought that I was going to accuse you of stealing it."

"Never, senor!" exclaimed the man quickly. "I get this from a friend, and I sell it to you for very little more than I paid."

"Oh, it was cheap enough," went on the lad. "I'm not kicking. Only I'd like to get another. I knew mother would like this, and she did. She loves old-fashioned things."

"And you want another for one who also loves of the time that is past—is that it, senor?"

"You've guessed it, Mendez. But keep mum about it. I want to surprise her."

Then the wind, blowing in a contrary direction, carried the voices away, and Tom kept on, having only halted momentarily.

CHAPTER XXI

IN THE SHACK

"JOVE!" murmured Tom, as he hurried on, "what have I stumbled upon?"

For the time being his thoughts were in a whirl, for like a flash it had come to him that the pin he had seen being handled by Mendez and Boswell was Ruth's missing brooch.

"I couldn't get close enough for a good look, but it sure was an old-fashioned pin, from their talk, and it looked like the one I've seen Ruth wear. The one with the secret spring."

He walked on a little farther.

"Now what's to be done?" he asked himself. "I guess I'll sit down and think this thing out."

Rapidly Tom went over in his mind what he had seen and heard.

"This seems to let Boswell out of it," he murmured. "And I'm glad of it—for the honor of Randall," and Tom thought of the events that had taken place some time ago, when the honor of Randall seemed to be threatened, events which I have narrated in the book of that title.

"If Boswell bought the pin of Mendez, then it must be the Mexican who is the man we're after," Tom went on. "He deals in jewelry, though most of it is that filigree silver stuff that I don't fancy. And Boswell wants Mendez to get him another old-fashioned pin like the one he already has. I wonder who for?"

But Tom did not wonder long on this point.

"The insolent puppy!" he exclaimed, clenching his fists. "If he tries to give Ruth a pin I'll——"

And then he calmed down, for he realized that, aside from the ethics, or good taste of the matter, Boswell had as much right to present Ruth with a token as had he himself.

"I guess I'd better reason along a new line," he told himself. "I'll have to let the boys know about this, and——"

Then, like a flash something else occurred to him.

"No, I can't do that," he said. "Phil isn't supposed to know that Ruth has lost her pin—that is, not yet. It would be too bad if the grand mother were to turn cranky, because of the loss of the brooch, and give her pearls to someone else—at least until I can buy Ruth some pearls myself—and that's a long way off, I'm afraid," thought Tom, ruefully.

"No, I've got to play this hand alone," he went

on. "I can't bring the fellows in—just yet. And I must tell Ruth not to admit that she has lost her brooch—at least, not yet. I may be able to get it back for her. The idea of Boswell having it—at least, I think it's the same one.

"And then by Jove! If Mendez had the brooch he has the other stuff that was in the jewelry box—the Boxer Hall cups and so on. Tom Parsons, you've stumbled on the solution of the mystery, I do believe. And you've got to work it out alone, for if you tell any of the fellows Ruth's secret will come out. Now, how are you going to do it?"

He pondered on the matter, and the first thing he decided on was that Ruth must be warned not to admit her loss.

"I'll attend to that right away," murmured the lad.

"Why, Tom, is anything the matter?" asked Ruth, when he saw her, a little later, at the Tyler cottage.

"Well, yes, something, but——"

"Oh, is Phil hurt?" and she clasped her hands.

"No, nothing like that. What made you think something was up, Ruth?"

"Because your face told me. What is it?"

"Well, if I were you, I wouldn't tell— just yet—that you haven't your brooch."

"Oh, Tom! Do you mean you think you can get it back?"

"I think so, but I'm not sure. But don't say anything."

"I won't. Oh! I'm only too glad not to have to admit it, though I'm afraid it's only postponing the fatal day. But what have you found?"

"I can't tell you Ruth—just yet. I've got quite a problem to work out. Later on I may need your help."

"Why, can't some of the boys?—oh, I see, you're keeping my secret for me. That's fine of you!"

"Just wait—that's all," was Tom's final advice. In the exuberance of his youth he imagined, that, should it prove that Boswell had bought Ruth's pin from the Mexican, the brooch could, by some means or other, be recovered.

"And now I am up against it," he went on, still communing with himself, after he had left Ruth. "I can't get the boys to help me, so I've got to go alone. And what's the first thing to be done?"

There were several points that needed clearing up.

"In the first place," reasoned Tom, "if Mendez had the brooch, which was in the jewel box, he has, or had, the other things. The question is—has he them yet? If he sold Boswell the pin he may have sold the other articles. I guess the only thing for me to do is to try and get in his shack—

when he's not home. It would be a ticklish piece of work to stumble in there, and be searching about, and have him find me. I wonder if I can get in when he's out? He does go out quite often."

Tom went on to camp, and his absentmindedness caused his chums no little wonder, until Sid exclaimed:

"Oh, it's all right—Tom's got the symptoms."

"What symptoms?" demanded our hero.

"The love symptoms. A lovers' quarrel made up is worse than falling in at first. Look out!" for Tom had shied a shoe at his tormentor.

"Practice to-day," announced Frank, the next morning. "Mr. Pierson said he'd be over early and we've got to go down and get the shell. He's going to put us through a course of sprouts to-day."

"All right," yawned Tom, with a fine appearance of indifference. "But I've got to mix the stuff for cake if I'm going to bake it." He had promised to show his skill in pastry-making. "So if you fellows will go down and get the shell I'll be ready when you come back."

"Three of us can't row a four-oared shell," protested Sid.

"Well, tow it up by the launch, then. I'm not going to have the cake spoiled."

"That's right," declared Frank. "The cook

is a sacred person. We'll tow up the shell," and they went off, never suspecting their chum.

And how Tom had dissembled! The making of the cake, he knew, had only been a subterfuge, for he had made up his mind he would buy one at the store, and offer some excuse to his chums that the camp-made one had "fallen" which, I believe, is the technical word to use when the top of a cake displays a tendency to lie on the bottom of the pan, and not stand up properly. I was once a camp cook, and some of my friends are still alive to bear witness against me.

Now what Tom planned was this: As soon as his chums were out of the way he decided to enter the Mexican's shack, having learned the evening before, by skillful questioning, that Mendez had some work to do around a distant cottage, and would be away all morning.

"And we'll see what I can find there," murmured Tom, as he set out.

It was an easy matter to enter the shack, at least that part where the Mexican lived. The store section was closed, but Tom knew there was an entrance to it through the main shack.

A carelessly-fastened window gave admittance, and soon after his chums had departed to get the shell (which was kept now in the new college boathouse, that structure having been nearly completed), Tom found himself inside the shack.

He began rummaging about, taking care not to unduly disturb objects. Tom was looking in a trunk, that appeared to contain some clothing, as well as some of the Mexican drawn-work, and some silks and satins, when he heard a noise outside.

"Someone is coming!" he whispered. "I've got to hide!" and he made a dive under the cot.

in the lock. At the same time there was an impatient muttering.

"That's not Mendez," decided Tom. "And from the voice it's none of our fellows, either. I wonder if it can be Boswell?"

The complications that might ensue if it was the rich student, who seemed to be sharing some secret with the Mexican, kept Tom busy thinking for a few seconds, and then his attention was further drawn toward the person outside.

"Hang it all!" exclaimed a voice in nasal tones—plainly the voice of an elderly man—"he's got some newfangled kind of a lock on here, and I can't get in. I wonder if a window is open?"

There was the rattle of a bunch of keys being returned to a pocket, and then the sound of footsteps coming around to the side of the shack.

"He's going to try my game," thought Tom. "Well if it isn't Mendez it's someone who hasn't any more right in here than I have, and I'm not in so much danger. But who can it be?"

There was a struggle at the window, the sound of a fall, as if the attempt to enter had failed. Then came muttered words of anger and pain, and they were followed by the sound of feet beating a tattoo on the side of the shack.

"He's scrambling up to the window," thought Tom, pulling the cot blankets farther down.

A moment later someone dropped down inside

"OLD JAKE BLASDELL!" MURMURED TOM, IN A WHISPER.

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the shack, and remained quietly in the middle of the floor, as though taking a survey of the place.

"Humph! It ain't much changed from when I was here last," a voice said, and Tom peered out from beneath a cautiously-raised blanket. The identity of the unexpected visitor startled him.

"Old Jake Blasdell!" murmured Tom, in a whisper. "The former caretaker! What in the world does he want here? I thought he had cleared out of these diggings."

Blasdell, for it was he, stood in the middle of the room of the shack where Mendez cooked, ate and slept—did everything, in fact, save conduct his small store, which was an addition.

"It's better than when I had it," Blasdell murmured, for, as I have said, when Mendez succeeded the former caretaker he had moved the shack from the place where Blasdell had built it, and had considerably improved it. "Much better," went on the old man. "Them Mexicans ain't so lazy as I've heard. Lucky for me I knowed of that window that didn't close very tight or I mightn't have gotten in. And lucky I happened to see Mendez as I did, and learned that he would be away all day. Now I'm in here where can I hide 'em. I don't dare carry 'em around with me much longer. Folks is beginning to suspect. And I'll take away that piece I left here, too."

"What in the world am I stacking up against?" thought the puzzled Tom. He looked out eagerly. Blasdell's back was turned toward the cot, but the old man did not appear to have anything to hide.

"Can he be out of his mind?" thought Tom.

He heard the man fumbling about, but from his position could not see what he was doing, and Tom dared not put out his head from under the cot.

"There, I guess nobody 'll think of lookin' for 'em there," went on the old man. "I s'pose mebby I ought t' destroy 'em, but they may come in useful some time or other. I'll leave 'em here, and take away that trinket."

Then came a sound as if the man had stepped down off a chair, or bench. Tom wished he could see what he had done, but at least he knew that something had been hidden on that side of the room were the stove was.

"Now I wonder if I can get out of the consarned window?" the man murmured. Tom heard him cross the room, and, after a struggle, there came the sound of a jump on the earth outside.

"He's gone!" murmured Tom, as he listened to the retreating footsteps. Then he scrambled out from under the cot, and began making a hasty search of the room.

If he had hoped to find Ruth's pin, the cups from Boxer Hall or any of the missing jewelry,

Tom was disappointed. He made a thorough, but quick, search, not only in the shack proper, but in the store, though he knew Blasdell had not gone in there.

"What could he have hidden?" thought Tom. "I've got to get out of here soon, or the fellows will be waiting for me."

He saw a small wooden clock on the mantle over the stove. An idea came to him.

"Maybe that clock hides a secret hole in the wall," he thought. Stepping on a chair he moved the timepiece. As he did so the door came open, and in the lower part, where swung the pendulum, he saw several bits of paper. There was no hole in the wall, but, wonderingly Tom picked up the papers. Then he started.

"Pawn tickets!" he cried, "and some of them for silver cups! I'm on the trail at last!"

CHAPTER XXIII

TWO MISSING MEN

"WELL, what do you know about that?"

"So that's where you sneaked off to when we went after the shell?"

"And that's why you didn't bake the cake?"

Tom's three chums gave expression to these sentiments as they looked over the bunch of pawn tickets he had brought away with him from the Mexican's shack. A hasty glance through them had shown Tom that none was for a brooch, and realizing that he could still keep Ruth's secret, he had decided to tell his friends the whole story. Which he did, keeping back only as much as was necessary not to let them know of Ruth's loss.

He related how he had overheard a "certain" conversation between Boswell and the Mexican, hurrying over that part of the story so they might not ask what the talk was about. Then he told of his own and Blasdell's visits to the shack.

"Say, this beats anything I ever heard of!" declared Frank.

"That's right, but what did the old beggar hide—if anything?" asked Sid.

"The pawn tickets, of course," declared Phil.

"I'm not sure of that, of course," spoke Tom. "I didn't see him, for I couldn't look out far enough from under the cot. But he was certainly on that side of the room. And he didn't hide the cups and jewelry, for they're in pawn, as these tickets show. So it must have been the tickets."

"Then if he had the tickets he took the stuff!" declared Sid.

"Not necessarily," objected Frank. "The Mexican and this Blasdell may be in partnership in crime. Either or both may have taken the jewelry, and Blasdell may have pawned it. Anyhow, I think this lets Boswell out, and I'm glad of it."

"So am I!" exclaimed Tom, and yet he wondered what the rich student and the Mexican could have in common, and he wondered about the old-fashioned brooch he had seen flashing in the sun, when the two talked in the boat. Also he wondered what Boswell wanted of another like it. In fact Tom was doing considerable wondering, and it was a puzzle in the solution of which he could not ask his chums' aid.

"So that's why you wanted us to go get the shell, and leave you here; is it?" asked Phil.

"Yes, I wanted time to investigate, and I didn't

want you fellows to give me the ha-ha! if nothing came of it."

"But lots did come of it!" declared Frank. "We can clear ourselves of the faint suspicion that I believe Boxer Hall thinks hangs over us, and we can get them back their trophy cups, and the other people their jewelry."

"Yes, I suppose the pawnbroker can be made to give up stolen stuff," said Tom. He was puzzling his brains to think of some reason why Ruth's brooch was not pawned with the other things. Recalling the list of missing articles, given out when the jeweler offered the reward, it was seen that all were representd by the pawn tickets, save Ruth's trinket.

"They're made out in the name 'A. Smith,'" said Phil, as he scrutinized the bits of paper. "Might be a blacksmith for all you can tell—probably a fake name. And the pawnbroker's place is in Monroe," he went on, naming a town about twenty-five miles away.

"Well," spoke Tom, "I suppose the thing to do is to go there, see the police, get the stuff, and return it to the jeweler. Then he can do as he likes with it."

"Incidentally we'll collect the reward," declared Sid.

"We'll donate it to the new racing association," suggested Frank. "Wouldn't it be a joke, if we

did take that part of the reward offered by Boxer Hall, and use it to help beat them in the race!"

"Sort of adding insult to injury," suggested Tom. "But I'm thinking we ought to let the Boxer Hall lads know about these tickets, and that there's a prospect of them getting back their trophies."

There were two opinions about this. Tom and Sid were one side, while Frank and Phil held it would be better to first get the stuff and then let Boxer Hall know.

"'There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip,' you know, Tom," said the Big Californian. "Not meaning a pun, either. But there may be some complications and it may take some time to get the stuff away from the pawnbroker. A delay would only fret all those who have lost things, and would be unpleasant for us. Get the stuff first, I say, and then hand it around."

And in the end this idea prevailed.

"Well, I can see where we get in precious little practice to-day," remarked Tom. "I think we'd all better go to Haddonfield and give these tickets to Mr. Farson. Let him get the police busy."

"All right, we're with you," said Phil. "But we need the practice, for it won't be long now before we're back at college."

"What about arresting Blasdell and the Mexican?" asked Sid.

"Let the jeweler attend to that," suggested Frank.

Without telling the girls of their discovery, the boys went to town in their launch, which, for a wonder, did not break down. Frank declared it was because he had put in a new set of batteries.

That Mr. Farson was astonished, is putting it mildly. He could not thank the boys enough. Privately, to Tom, who managed to get him a word in secret, the jeweler said he could not account for Ruth's pin not being represented by a ticket.

"But I'll look all through that pawnbroker's stock for it," he said.

Mr. Farson decided that the would first go to Munroe and get the cups and jewelry, and later see about causing the arrest of the guilty person, or persons.

"The pawnbroker would have to identify the thief, anyhow," he explained. "Now you boys go back to the island and stay there. I'll hire an auto and go to Munroe. As soon as I get back I'll run over and let you know how I make out. Oh, this is good news for me!"

"What became of Blasdell after he jumped out of the shack, Tom?" asked Phil.

"How could I tell? I was under the cot."

"That's so. And he doesn't seem to be around

these diggings any more. He just showed up with these pawn tickets, and then lit out again. And to think he was the fellow who had the stuff all the while!"

"He or Mendez," said Tom. "I'm not sure which. It's queer that Blasdell should come all the way back to hide the tickets in the shack. I heard him speak of getting something that belonged to him, but I don't know what it was."

They argued the matter, but could come to no agreement. Going back to their island camp, they found time for a little practice in the shell, Mr. Pierson coaching them. Then they waited impatiently for the return of the jeweler.

"I wonder what Mendez will think when he gets back and finds his place has been ransacked?" suggested Sid.

"He won't know it," declared Tom. "I was mighty careful, and Blasdell wasn't inside more than a few minutes. Let's take a stroll around there, and size it up."

"No, keep away," decided Frank. "It might make trouble. Let's wait until Mr. Farson comes."

It was nearly dusk when they saw a small launch approaching the island, and they recognized the jeweler as one of the occupants.

"He doesn't seem very joyous," remarked

Tom. "He isn't waving his hat, or anything like that."

Somehow his words brought a feeling of doubt to his chums, yet they could not tell why. Nearer came the launch. It drew up to the little dock the boys had made.

"Well?" queried Tom, nervously. "How did you make out?"

"Not at all," was the surprising reply.

"What! Didn't you get the things?" demanded Phil.

"No. The pawnbroker closed out his place of business last week, and the store is vacant."

For a moment no one spoke. Then Frank said:

"But look here. You know a pawnbroker has to be licensed. He can't go out of busness that way. He may move, but he has to let people know about it. And he can't dispose of their things inside of a year, either. That man had no right to do that."

"I don't know about his rights," said the jeweler, "but the fact remains that he has skipped out. He may have taken the cups and jewelry with him for all I know. The police say he was a sort of 'fence' through which stolen property was often disposed of. He's been arrested several times, but nothing could be proved against him."

"What did you do?" asked Sid.

"The police in Munroe promised to try and trace him. I'm going to have circulars printed, too, and sent to other cities, asking for news of this pawnbroker."

"Say, this is tough, to almost get the stuff and then lose it!" remarked Phil. "It's a good thing we didn't tell the Boxer Hall lads."

"That's what," declared Tom.

"Fellows, I've got an idea!" exclaimed Sid.

"Chain it so it doesn't get away," advised Frank.

"I say let's go to that Mexican's shack, and see if we can get anything out of him," went on Sid. "We got on the trail there, and he must be mixed up in it some way. Come on, Mr. Farson, you've got a right to question him."

"I believe I will!" decided the jeweler, and he followed the lads toward the shack, through the lengthening shadows.

"I guess he isn't home," remarked Tom, as they saw no light in the place.

"Knock and see," suggested Phil.

A tap on the door brought no response. Tom peered a bit closer.

"The place isn't closed," he exclaimed. He pushed open the door. Someone struck a match. Then came an exclamation of surprise from all.

For there was evidence that Mendez had hastily fled. The room was in confusion, things being

scattered about, and a look into the store showed that everything he had had for sale had been removed. Mendez was missing, as was the pawnbroker and the jewelry.

CHAPTER XXIV

BACK AT RANDALL

"THIS is the limit!"

"Where could he have gone?"

"He smelt a rat all right—he's sure mixed up in this business."

"And the quiet way he sneaked off! Let's find out if anyone saw him go."

Thus the chums exclaimed as the queer situation dawned upon them. Mr. Farson, too, was surprised, and did not know what to make of it.

"I think I will devote all my efforts to locating the pawnbroker," he said. "If I get the stuff back that belongs to other persons, I don't care so much about an arrest."

"But we'd like to solve the mystery, seeing that we had a hand in it," said Tom. "I wonder where Mendez could have gone?"

But no one knew—no one had seen him go. Later that evening, when the young men, after the jeweler had gone to his store, made inquiries of the owner of the cottage where the Mexican had

been working all that day, they were told by a servant that a boy, coming in a boat, had brought a message to the caretaker. He had seemed surprised, and had hurried off, leaving his work partly finished, promising to return. But he did not, and that was the last seen of him—at least for the time being.

Evidently he had taken alarm at something, had hurried to the shack, hastily packed up his belongings, and fled in a boat. In fact the rowboat he generally used was missing.

As far as it went there was nothing criminal in his actions. There was no direct connection between him and the missing jewelry. He bore a good reputation among the cottagers, and had always done his work well. He was honest in his dealings, and his word could be taken in regard to the things he sold. Some of the cottagers even owed him for work performed.

"It's another mystery connected with this strange affair," said Tom, as he and his chums turned in for the night. "We may get to the bottom of it some day."

"I hope so," murmured Frank. "We've been doing more detective work than rowing of late. We'll have to buckle down from now on. College opens in three weeks."

Of course the flight of Mendez was known to the girls, as well as to all others on the island, but

the circumstances connected with it, and the finding of the pawn tickets, was kept a secret.

I say from all, but that is not quite correct. Tom did tell Ruth all, and they both puzzled over the fact that there was no ticket for the brooch. But Tom did not tell Ruth what he had overheard between Boswell and Mendez.

"It might be Ruth's brooch that Boswell bought of Mendez, for his mother," reasoned Tom. "If Ruth thought so she might make a fuss and insist on having it back. Then, again, it might not be hers, and that would make trouble. I've got to investigate a little more before I tell her."

The Boswell family closed up their cottage the next week, and left for their mountain home, where the rich lad and his parents were to spend the rest of the vacation.

Our boys put in some hard practice in the shell, once or twice getting enough rowers so that they could use the eight. Mr. Pierson gave them valuable coaching.

Then, on his advice, they gave themselves up to a good rest, and the enjoyment of camp life.

"You'll want a week or two when you don't see an oar," he explained. "There is such a thing as overdoing it. And you will soon be back at college you say, and begin hard training. So take a rest now."

And the boys did, though their "rest" con-

sisted chiefly in giving the girls a good time. The wheezy little launch was worked to the limit.

Then came the approach of the college season. Several cottages on the island were closed. The girls said farewell to Madge, for they must spend some time with their own folks, and one day Tom remarked:

"Say, fellows, let's break camp. It's no fun here without the girls."

"That's right," agreed Sid, and so the tents were struck, and our heroes went their several ways to enjoy what was left of their vacation before again gathering at Randall. And in that time nothing new developed about the missing cups and jewelry. Nor was any word heard of the pawnbroker or Mendez.

"Hello, there's Dutch Housenlager, bigger than ever!"

"Yes, and there's Bricktop redder than ever. I say, Brick!"

"Hello, Parsons, you look as brown as a berry. What have you been doing with yourself?"

"Camping."

"You look it. I was at the shore—beastly hot, too!"

"Say, isn't the new boathouse swell?"

"Nothing like it. Oh, it's going to be great at Randall this Fall."

"Over this way, Henderson! Where's Phil and Frank?" cried Tom.

"I don't know. I just got in. Have you been up to the room?"

"No, I just landed, too. Have you fed your face?"

"Not since I got here. Let's grub and then we'll open up the place. Hi, there, Snail! How's the night work?"

"Oh, so-so," replied Sam Looper, re-christened "Snail," because of his slowness, and his propensity for night prowling.

"Here come the Jersey twins!"

"That's right. I hope Jerry makes a good coxswain in the varsity eight," went on Tom. "We need him."

"Hear you did some practicing this Summer," remarked Dutch, as he playfully dug his elbow into Tom's ribs.

"We did. I'm anxious to get hold of an oar again. Have the new shells come?"

"I haven't heard. We'll inquire. I saw Mr. Lighton a bit ago."

It was the opening of Randall College for the Fall term, and our friends, as well as their chums, had returned not only to lessons but to sports as well—cross-country running, football—ever glorious football—and now and chiefly, rowing, for

the regatta was to be held before the big battles of the gridiron took place.

"Come on!" cried Tom, as he spied his three chums. "Let's slip up to our room and talk things over."

This was after a more or less hurried meal had been eaten.

"And we sure have lots to talk about," remarked Sid. "But let's get through with it and take a run up to Fairview. I guess——"

"You guess the girls are there—that's what you guess!" interrupted Tom. "Hark to him, fellows. Isn't he the limit!"

And then, linking arms, the four inseparables strolled across the campus, through groups of students, toward their room.

CHAPTER XXV

THE NEW SHELLS

"Say, aren't they beauts!"

"All to the cream!"

"Nothing like 'em ever seen on this river before!"

"And look at the eight! Isn't that a peach?"

"Easy there, Housenlager, that isn't a ferry-boat!" and Jerry Jackson kept the big lad from stepping into the new eight-oared shell. The other exclamations, as may easily be surmised, came from the college lads as they gathered about the new float and boathouse, in front of which were the new craft that had been put in the water that day. It was a week or so after the opening of Randall, and matters were shaping themselves up in some kind of order.

"Two fours, four singles, two doubles and the eight!" remarked Tom. "Say, that committee of old grads certainly did themselves proud all right!"

"They sure did," agreed Sid.

"And this boathouse can't be beat!" added

Phil, as he and the others inspected the new structure.

"I only hope that same thing applies to our boats," remarked the Big Californian, grimly. "There'll be something coming to us if they can't be beaten."

"Let's get in and have a trial," suggested Sid. "Come, we've got enough for two eights—one crew in the old shell and one in the new. We'll find out if she's stiff enough."

"Better wait until Mr. Lighton gives the word," suggested Tom. "They'll want to soak up a bit, anyhow, being new; and our weight might open up the seams too much."

In fact the boats had only been in the water since that morning, a committee of the rowing association superintending their removal from the freight station on trucks.

The letter announcing that they were on their way had been received some little time before, and the advent of the rowing craft was eagerly waited. Then had come a simple ceremony, when a committee of the presenting graduates had formally turned over the boathouse and outfit to Randall College.

"Well, we'll have to organize soon, pick out a coxswain and captain, and arrange for hard training," said Tom.

"Yes, there isn't much time between now and

the football season," agreed Frank. "Boxer Hall and Fairview will want to wind up the rowing game as early as they can. It's been a double drill for them, since they raced in the Spring. Next Spring we'll get in the game with them."

"Here comes Mr. Lighton," suggested Sid. "Maybe he'll have something to say," and he indicated the coach coming down toward the boathouse.

"Well, boys, how do you like them?" asked Mr. Lighton, as he indicated the new craft.

"Swell!"

"Peachy!"

"Pippy!"

These were only a sample of the many expressions of approval.

"I guess I'll slip in one of those singles and have a try at it," remarked Boswell, starting for the dressing rooms to change into rowing costume.

"No, don't, please—not just yet," said Mr. Lighton. "I want to look them over first, to see if there are any flaws. You can take out one of the old ones."

"Say, you don't seem to want me to do anything in the boating line!" exclaimed the rich lad. "You shifted me out of the eight, and now you don't want me to practice in a single. I tell you I know something about a boat—I've done as

much work this Summer as those fellows," and he indicated Tom and his three chums.

"That's all right," responded Mr. Lighton, quietly. "I'm not denying that, but I want you to understand that I did not shift you out of the eight without good reason, and there is still time for you to try to make good—even yet."

"No, I'm going to stick to the single—and I'm going to win!" snapped Boswell.

"Good—I hope you do," assented the coach. "Now, boys, we've got to get together, select a captain for the varsity, also the coxswain, as well as officials, and rowers for the other boats. It won't do to go at this slip-shod fashion. What do you say to a meeting to-night to select the officials?"

"Good!" came the general cry, and then matters were talked over at length. As far as arrangements with Boxer Hall and Fairview were concerned, they had been practically completed in the Spring. All that remained was the selection of the day for the regatta, the marking of the course, the settlement of rules, which would be practically the same as those governing Boxer Hall and Fairview, and the selecting of the officials.

The other two colleges had very little to do to get ready for the races, but Randall had considerable. However, under the guidance of Mr. Lighton, affairs soon shaped up.

There was some wire-pulling in regard to the election of a varsity captain, but the choice eventually fell upon Frank Simpson, who pulled stroke. It met with general approval, for all liked the Big Californian, and no one who had been tried at stroke did anywhere nearly as well as did he. For coxswain the choice fell upon Jerry Jackson—in fact there was no opposition, for many who might have liked to try for it, felt that they were not equal to the responsibility. But Jerry seemed to fit in there naturally. He was just the right weight, Mr. Lighton said; he had a certain delicacy, yet firmness, in steering, and he could use judgment.

As for the singles, their disposition was simple. A number of lads signified their desire to enter into a competition among themselves, the best to be picked to meet Boxer Hall and Fairview contestants. Boswell was to be one who would enter the elimination trials, and he accepted the responsibility with an air of confidence that caused much secret amusement, and no little disgust. Snail Looper also expressed a desire to try, as did a number of others.

In the doubles a number of new lads, with whom we are not immediately concerned, entered, and as for the fours, some juniors and sophomores, together with a few freshmen, made up three com-

binations, the best one of which was to meet the rivals.

"As for the eight," said Mr. Lighton, "which craft, in a measure will be regarded as the main varsity boat, we now have two crafts—the old one and the new. I suggest that there be elimination trials, and several friendly races between the two crews.

"In this way not only will you get practice, but you will have experience in pulling against another boat, which will stand you in good stead.

"I have also to announce that Mr. Pierson, whom some of you know as the old Cornell oarsman, has kindly consented to help me in coaching you. We will draw up a set of training rules, and I expect every man to follow them faithfully. Otherwise there is no use in going into this thing. Remember the condition of this magnificent gift to Randall was that she should prove herself a victor."

"And she will!" cried Tom, while the others echoed his words.

There remained a few other preliminaries to arrange, and minor officials to select, and then the meeting of the athletic committee ended.

"Oh, I say!" cried Phil, at the conclusion. "I wonder if it's too late to go see the girls?"

"Guess not," agreed Tom. "I'm with you."

"Same here," echoed Frank and Phil, and they

hurried to catch a trolley for Fairview Institute.

As they walked up the steps to the building where the young ladies were permitted to receive visitors, they saw a lad standing there. Just as Tom was about to ring the bell, the door opened, and a maid announced to the waiting lad:

"Miss Clinton can see no one."

"She is out, do you mean?"

"I do not know. That was the message Miss Philock told me to give you."

"Oh, all right," and, turning so that the light from the hall shone on his face, the countenance of Boswell was disclosed to our friends.

"Oh!" he exclaimed blankly, as he recognized them. Then looking at Tom he added:

"Perhaps you'll have better luck than I did, Parsons!"

"Perhaps," admitted Tom, drily.

CHAPTER XXVI

"ROW HARD"

THE four chums watched Boswell go down the steps and get into a waiting auto, the maid, meanwhile, regarding them half curiously, for she knew them well, from frequent visits.

"Some class to him," remarked Sid.

"Yes, he's finding his way here all right," added Tom.

"Well, it's a free country," added Phil. "He came to see Ruth, if I'm any judge."

"And got turned down," added Frank.

"I wonder if the girls are really out?" ventured Tom.

"I'll see if the young ladies are in," remarked the maid. She did not have to ask which young ladies were meant.

She returned shortly to say that, while it was almost too late for visitors, Miss Philock had consented that the four chums could see their friends for ten minutes.

"Say, what's gotten into the old Ogress—she's so pleasant to us?" Sid wanted to know.

"Probably this is the calm before the storm," suggested Phil. "We may be turned down after this, the same as Boswell was."

"I wonder what he wanted?" mused Tom.

"Oh, probably to ask the best way to darn socks without tying a string around the hole," suggested Frank, with delicate sarcasm.

"Here come the girls!" exclaimed Tom, and the murmur of voices bore out his remark.

While the conversation that followed was probably of intense and absorbing personal interest to those who took part in it, there was not enough of general interest to warrant me setting it down here. Sufficient to say that all sorts of matters, from the coming regatta to the opening of the football season, were discussed, and commented upon. Needless to say the Fairview girls, with commendable loyalty, declared that their college was going to be the champions of the gridiron and river.

Tom found chance for a quiet word with Ruth just before the ringing of a warning bell announced that visiting hours were nearly over. She explained that it was a surprise to her when Boswell called, and she and her chums decided not to meet him.

"I haven't found out anything more about your pin," Tom said. "That is, I haven't located it," for he did not want to go into details about the

missing pawnbroker and Mendez. Nothing more had been heard of either.

"Too bad," Ruth declared. "I suppose, though, I might as well keep quiet about the loss of it until some one of my folks notice that it's gone," she said. "It will be time enough then to confess, though I suppose I'll be in for a wigging from grandmother for keeping still about it so long."

"Yes, it can't do any harm to keep quiet now," decided Tom, "and something may turn up at any minute."

"Then you really have some hope, Tom?"

"Yes—a little," he admitted. "But I can't talk about it, Ruth. It involves others."

"Oh, tell me Tom! I'll keep it a secret!" she pleaded.

"No, really I can't," he said, and though she made it rather hard for him, he kept to his resolve.

"It is time your friends left, young ladies!" announced the rather rasping voice of Miss Philock, a little later. "I have been lenient with you to the extent of ten minutes, but now I must insist."

"Thank you for your kindness," exclaimed Phil, with a low bow. "We greatly appreciate it."

"I am glad that you do," declared the preceptress, not allowing a smile to change the hard con-

tour of her face. Poor Miss Philock! Doubtless she did not have a happy time of it, and her responsibilities must have weighed on her. It is not an easy task to be the dragon, guarding a number of pretty girls, when two colleges for young men are not far off. And Miss Philock did her duty, however unpleasant it was.

Tom was awakened that night, shortly after one o'clock. At least he judged it to be about that hour, for he dimly recalled hearing a distant clock booming out twelve; then he had fallen into a doze, and it could not have been over an hour later when a noise and movement in the main apartment, out of which all their rooms opened, roused him.

"Wonder who that is?" he thought, sleepily. "Maybe we did a little too much to-day, and some of the boys can't rest. I'll take a look."

He raised himself upon his elbow, but, though he had a partial view of the sitting room from that position, he could see no one. The scuffling of feet on the carpet, however, and the faint rattle of paper, told that someone was up and about.

Softly Tom put his legs over the edge of the bed, so that it would not creak, for, somehow, he had a faint suspicion that perhaps the person in the other room might not be one of his chums, and, in that case, he wanted to be prepared.

Gently he stepped out until he stood in the door

of his own room, and had a view of the main apartment. Then he saw a white-robed figure standing looking out of the window that gave a view of the campus, over which a faint moon was then shining.

"That looks like Sid," thought Tom. "I wonder if he's getting spoony—or loony or moony? Maybe he couldn't sleep and got up to change the current of his thoughts. Well, shall I go out and keep him company, or——"

Tom reconsidered the matter a moment.

"No," he thought, "if I go out there, and we get to chinning, even in whispers, it will rouse Frank and Phil, and then we'll all be wide awake. And the land knows we need all the sleep we can get. I can find my way to dreamland without being sung to, anyhow."

For a moment he watched the figure by the window. It was Sid, Tom felt sure of that, though night-garments, be they pajamas or the more prosaic shirts, do not make for identifying individuals. There is little of character to them.

Then the figure by the window turned partly toward Tom, but, as the face was in the shadow, the watching lad could not see it plainly. The figure approached the table, on which was a litter of paper, where the lads had been doing some studying earlier in the evening.

"By Jove!" thought Tom. "Old Sid is writing

poetry—or he has been courting the muse! This is rich! He can't sleep and he gets up in the night to jot down a verse or two. That's it! And about a girl, too, I'll wager! Oh, Sid!" and he chuckled silently. "I'll rig you for this in the morning! Loony, spoony, moony Sid! This is rich!" and Tom doubled up with silent mirth.

The figure continued to approach the table, and from the other rooms the deep, regular breathing told of sound sleepers. Then the figure began fumbling with papers and Tom saw a pencil taken up.

"How the mischief can he see to write in the dark?" the watcher wondered.

But that was evidently not the intention. For, after hesitating a few seconds over the table, the white-clad figure turned and went out of the door into the hall.

"Well, what do you make of that?" Tom asked himself. "He has got 'em bad! Sneaking out to some other room to write his slushy poetry. He's the limit! Wait until we get at him in the daylight—there won't be any loony-moon then. But I should think he'd want to put on a bath robe. It isn't the warmest night of Summer," added Tom to himself, being aware of a distinctly chilly feeling about his legs.

"Wait!" he counseled with himself. "I'll find

out about this. I'll just follow him and give him a scare. I'll catch him with the goods."

Pausing to make sure that none of the others were awake, and waiting to give Sid a chance to get a little way down the corridor, Tom slipped out of the door, his feet encased in a pair of bath slippers, that lent themselves better to soft movement than not, for they avoided the scuffling that always goes with bare soles.

Tom reached the corridor, and, looking down it, saw at the farther end the white-robed figure.

"He made good time all right," Tom mused. "Where can he be going to though, in that rig? Oh, probably to the reading room," and Tom recalled the large room at the end of the hall, a sort of library fitted up for the use of the dwellers of the dormitory—a room seldom used by the way, for the lads preferred the seclusion of their own apartments.

"Maybe he's looking for a rhyming dictionary," thought Tom. "That's it. I'm on to his game now."

Tom thought he understood it all. Sid, who used to care nothing for the girls—indeed having a veritable aversion for them—had, of late, been quite different, as Tom and all the others saw and knew. There was one in particular—and it would not be fair for me to mention her name—one in

particular about whom Sid, if he did not talk, thought much.

"And he's going to finish out some poem he began, and got stuck with," decided Tom. "Probably he knows we'd rig him if we saw him writing that Valentine stuff.

"A rhyming dictionary though. I don't see what he needs of that. Love, dove, above—you true—eyes of blue. Heart—part—die, sigh—moon—soon—spoon—no, not that. But hair—fair—ever there—thine—mine—valentine. There you are, done without the aid of a net, and with nothing concealed up my sleeve," mused Tom, shivering slightly as a chilling breeze from the corridor not only crept up his arm, but over other parts of his anatomy.

The figure ahead of him glided on, and Tom followed. Then, instead of turning into the library, it mounted a flight of stairs that led to the rooms above, where other students slept.

"For cats' sake!" thought Tom. "What is Sid up to anyhow?" Is he going to snare someone else in on this game? Or is he playing some trick? The bell in the tower! Jove, if he dares to ring that at this hour!"

For, when the new dormitory had been built, a bell had been hung in an ornate corner tower, though it pealed forth but seldom, being more of an ornament. Still it could be rung if desired.

"That's what old Sid is up to!" decided Tom. "He must be going daffy. He's sure to be caught, for Simond has a room up there, and he's a light sleeper." Simond being one of the new teachers, who had been assigned to this dormitory as a sort of moral-policeman. He was, however, a well-liked instructor.

"I wonder how it would be for me to tip Sid off not to do it?" thought Tom. "If he does jingle the chimes they'll say we all had a hand in it, and it will be bad for the bunch. I guess I'll call him off. No use going too far for a joke."

Tom was about to sprint forward, when, to his surprise, the figure turned and entered one of the student's rooms, the door opening noiselessly and closing again as silently.

"Well, what do you know about that?" asked Tom of himself. "Who rooms there, I wonder? And what is Sid going in there for? Can it be that he isn't up to dashing off a fervid love poem himself, and has to get someone else, under the cover of night, to do it for him?"

Tom came to a halt, some distance from the door that had opened and closed, and remained gazing down the corridor. He seldom came up here, and did not know which students occupied the different rooms. And, as the corridor was long, and as Tom was looking down it on an angle, he could not be exactly sure which door had

opened, they being all alike, and many without numbers.

"I'll just stay here and wait," he decided. "He can't stay in there very long," and then Tom began to wish he had slipped on his bath robe, for he was getting more and more chilly each minute.

"Hang it all! Why doesn't he come out?" he asked himself half a dozen times. "I'm not going to stay here all night."

But even at that, while calling himself all sorts of a foolish person, Tom remained.

"It's too good a joke to pass up!" he decided. "I'll surprise Sid when he comes out. Poetry! Bah! We'll write a love verse for him!"

Several minutes passed. Tom moved about, and began to do some exercises with his arms, to bring up his circulation. He was striking out vigorously, feeling in quite a glow, when his elbow, as he drew back his arm, came in sharp contact with the door behind him. Unaware of it, he had been standing in front of some portal while he waited.

"Oh, for cats' sake!" thought Tom, in grim despair as the sound boomed out with startling distinctness in that dim and silent corridor. "Now I have gone and done it. I guess I'd better pass up Sid and his poem, and get back to my little bed. I wonder if I can make it before someone sticks out his noddle, and wants to know what I'm doing here?"

With this thought in mind he started to glide away, but he was too late. The door he had banged with his elbow suddenly opened, and a voice demanded in peremptory tones:

"Well, what is it?"

"Great Scott!" gasped Tom. "It's Simond!" for the countenance of the instructor was thrust from the half-opened portal.

"Well?" went on the rather grim voice, as Tom hesitated. "You knocked."

"It—it was an accident," stammered Tom.

"Oh. Then you don't want me?"

"No, sir."

"Is anything the matter?"

"No, Mr. Simond."

"Then what are you doing up on this floor? You're Parsons, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you room on the floor below?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then what are you doing up here at this hour of the night; knocking at my door?"

"I—er—it was an accident, you see. I was—I was exercising."

"Exercising?" There was a note of incredulity in the voice.

"Yes, exercising."

"What for?" Cold sarcasm now took the place of surpise.

"To keep warm."

"Look here, Parsons!" exclaimed the instructor. "You may think this is a joke, but——"

"No, sir; it's no joke. I was exercising to keep warm. Arm exercising you know, and my elbow banged your door—I didn't know I was so close."

"I see. Well, are you warm now?"

"Oh, yes, sir." Indeed Tom was in a veritable rosy glow.

"But what was the necessity of getting cold?" went on Mr. Simond, and Tom became aware that others were listening to the talk, for he could hear doors down the hall cautiously opened, and faint snickers of laughter here and there.

Tom was in a quandary. He did not want to tell the real object of coming up stairs as he had, for it would only make trouble for Sid.

And yet if he kept silent he would be put down for having tried to play some prank on his own account. Still if Sid had "gotten away" with whatever he had attempted, and it seemed so, for no sound came from the neighborhood of the room he had entered—in that case Tom could not bring him into the game.

"I guess I've got to take my medicine," thought Tom.

"Well?" demanded Mr. Simond in a cold voice.

"I—I just came up here for a—for a walk, explained Tom. "I—er—I couldn't sleep, and——"

"I see. You thought if you came and waked me up that you *could* sleep; is that it?"

"Oh, not at all, Mr. Simond." He could be funny when he wanted to, thought shivering Tom. "I—er—I was just going back to bed," he explained lamely, for that was true enough.

"Very well, then you'd better go *now*," concluded Mr. Simond. "And don't knock on any more doors, or I shall have to look further into the matter. Good-night!"

"Good-night!" gasped Tom, surprised to be let off thus easily. "It was all a mistake, I assure you," he added, as he glided away.

"Well, don't *repeat* the mistake," was the grim injunction of the instructor, as he closed his door, and Tom vowed that he would not—at least that night.

"I'm a chump!" he told himself as he hurried back to his room. "I might better have let Sid grind out his mushy poetry in peace, and gotten my sleep. Now I may be in for a lecture tomorrow."

As he entered the room he saw, grouped in the middle of the apartment, his three chums. The sight of Sid, with Phil and Frank, caused Tom to halt.

"Where in thunder have you been?" demanded Phil. "We were just going to get up a searching party for you."

"That's right," came from Sid. "What do you mean by chasing out at this hour?"

"What do *you* mean, I guess it is!" exclaimed Tom. "I've been chasing you, Sid."

"Chasing me? What rot is that?"

"It's all right. I woke up when I heard you moving about in here, followed you out to the corridor. You were going to write a poem, you know."

"Say, am I crazy or is he?" demanded Sid, appealing to the others. "Writing poetry?"

"Yes; weren't you?" asked Tom, beginning to think he had more of a mystery on his hands than he had at first suspected.

"Worse and more of it," murmured Frank.

"Do you mean to tell me?" demanded Tom, "that you didn't sneak out of here a while ago, and go to one of the rooms on the next floor?" and he looked defiantly at Sid.

"I certainly won't tell, or admit, anything of the kind, because it isn't so," replied Sid. "Admitting that I had, will you kindly explain how *I* could be here when *you* came in; in that case?"

"That's so," admitted Tom, scratching his head in perplexity. "Unless," he added as an afterthought, "unless you came down the back stairs, when I was chinning with Simond."

"Chinning with Simond?" demanded Phil. "Do you mean to say you were caught by him?"

"Yes. I banged on his door."

"Banged on his door?"

"Yes, by accident. You see I was exercising to keep warm."

The three paused and looked at each other. Clearly they did not understand.

"Look here, Tom," began Frank in a gentle, soothing voice. "How long have you been this way? Did it come on suddenly, or are you subject to these fits? Have you seen a doctor? Don't you think we'd better wire your folks? Maybe if you lie down it will wear off. Isn't it sad, and him so young, too!" and he sighed in mock distress.

"Look here, you chump!" cried Tom indignantly. "You think I'm stalling; don't you? But I'm not. Here's how it happened," and he told of the circumstances, and of his suspicions against Sid.

"And while I was waiting for him—as I thought—to come out of that room upstairs," he went on, "I got chilly. So I exercised. My elbow banged on Simond's door, and he opened the oak. Then I had to explain."

"That's a rich one!" declared Phil.

"He must have thought you were crazy!" said Frank.

"Exercising at that hour of the night!" exclaimed Sid. "This is too good to keep!" and he laughed outright.

"Not so loud," cautioned Phil, "or we'll rouse the place. Anything else, Tom?"

"Isn't that enough ? But say, Sid, are you sure you weren't out?"

"Of course I am. Ask Phil and Frank. They woke me up in bed."

"That's right!" chorused the two.

"I heard a noise," explained Phil, "and woke up. I was just in time to see you going out of the room, Tom, and——"

"That was when I was after Sid," Tom explained.

"You mean you thought it was me," put in Sid.

"Well, have it that way if you like. But if it wasn't you I chased, who was it?" demanded Tom, after the manner of one propounding a difficult riddle.

"That's up to you to find out," spoke the Big Californian. "Are you sure you *did* see and follow someone, Tom?"

"Of course I am. Do you think I'm crazy?"

"I don't know," was Frank's simple remark.

"There's something wrong," went on Sid, "but we can't get to the bottom of it now. If there was someone in our room we want to know it."

"Well, there was," declared Tom, positively. "*I* know it!"

"Anyhow, I saw you going out," resumed Phil. "I wondered what was up, but I thought maybe

you felt sick, and was going to the medicine cabinet at the end of the corridor. So I went back to bed, and when you didn't return in ten minutes I roused Sid and Frank."

"And you found Sid in bed?" demanded Tom.

"Sleeping like a babe—the result of an innocent conscience. Was it not?" asked Sid, with an air of virtue.

"Yes, little one," came from Phil, with a bow.

"Then we all speculated on what could be the matter with you," added Frank.

"And we were about to organize a relief expedition, with six months' supply of rations, and start out," was Sid's contribution.

"When in you came prancing as though you had been out for a constitutional," concluded Phil.

"Telling us that you had been *exercising*," commented Sid, sarcastically. "Talk about following *me* in a suspicious manner, I rather think the dancing slipper is on the other boot, my friend."

"Well, this gets me!" confessed Tom, blankly.

"Then it's the second time you've been gotten at this night," declared Frank. "For Simond had you first."

"Oh, he was decent about it," Tom said. "I don't believe anything will come of it. I'm going to get to bed. It's as cold as Greenland here," and he made a dive for his room.

"What time is it, anyhow?" asked Sid with a

yawn. "Did we take the toothpick out of the alarm clock, I wonder?"

The three of them glanced toward the table where the timepiece was wont to tick. It was the cutsom to wind and set it before going to bed, the last one to retire being charged with the duty of removing the toothpick, which was used to silence the ticking that annoyed the chums when they were studying.

"Why—why—it's gone—gone!" gasped Tom, halting on his way to his room.

"That's right!" chorused the others.

"Tom Parsons, is this your joke?" demanded Sid, sternly.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean did you take that clock away for a joke, and then, when you got caught, made up that fake story about chasing me?"

"I—did—not!" exclaimed Tom in such a manner that they could not help believing him.

"Then where is it?" demanded Frank.

There was silence for several seconds, while the white-clad figures regarded one another. Then Tom burst out with:

"I have it!"

"I thought you did," said Sid significantly.

"No, you gump! I mean I have the solution. It was that chap who was in here, and whom I took for you, Sid. He has our clock. I'll get it back!"

Tom was about to rush out into the corridor, when Frank laid a restraining hand on his sholder.

"Hold on, son," he began mildly. "There's been enough running around for one night. It won't be healthy, for one thing, to do any more, for it is beastly cold. And, for another, there is no use in running our heads into a noose. Simond was decent, you say, Tom, and there's no sense in putting it on him—rubbing it in, so to speak. We'll just lay low until morning and then we'll get our clock. You say you know where it is?"

"Well, I saw the fellow that was in here enter some room on the floor above. I couldn't pick it out exactly, but I can come pretty near it."

"That'll be all right. Who do you think it was?"

"Dutch Housenlager!" declared Tom.

"He doesn't room up there," retorted Phil.

"Well, he may have slipped in some room up there to throw me off," said Tom.

"More likely it was Jerry Jackson," was Frank's opinion. "He was poking fun at the clock yesterday."

"As long as he doesn't poke anything more than fun at it, all right," said Phil. "We're the only ones licensed to use toothpicks and battle-axes on it."

"Poor old clock," sighed Sid. "It does get abused, but still it is a faithful friend. Remember

the time that duffer—what was his name—took out some of the wheels to make some machine he was crazy over? Remember that?"

"I should say so!" exclaimed Tom. "But this chap wasn't satisfied with a single wheel—he wanted the whole works. I wonder who it could be?"

"I shouldn't wonder but what the Snail had a hand in this," opined Phil. "He's so fond of roaming about nights."

"He stays over in the North dormitory now," declared Frank. "Besides, he wouldn't get in here at this hour of the morning—at least I think it must be near morning. The doors are locked after hours, you know. No, it was someone from here all right, who took that clock."

"And the nerve of 'em!" exclaimed Phil.

"And to think Tom took that lad—whoever he was—for me," put in Sid. "Did he really look like me?"

"He sure did."

"Maybe it was Bean Perkins," suggested Frank.

"No, Bean wouldn't do a trick like that. He couldn't keep quiet enough," declared Tom. "He'd want to give a class yell or sing a song in the middle of it, and that would give it away. Say, but I have a scheme though."

"Out with it, and then let's get to bed," yawned Frank.

"We won't say anything about this," spoke Tom, "and——"

"Not say anything about it!" cried Sid. "Well, I guess we will! Think we're going to let our clock disappear, and keep mum over it? I guess not!"

"I didn't mean that," explained Tom. "I meant that we'd not come out boldly, and admit that we didn't know enough to keep our clock from being taken. But to-morrow—at chapel—or whenever we can, we'll just sneak up back of Dutch, the Jersey twins, or whoever else we suspect, and say 'clock' to them. That will make the guilty one start, and we'll have our man."

"I see—a sort of detective stunt," remarked Frank.

"Sort of," admitted Tom.

"How would it do to make a noise like a tick," suggested Phil.

"Say, I'm not joking," exclaimed Tom.

"Neither am I," asserted Phil. "But let's be real mysterious about it, and we'll get the guilty one so much more easily."

"Oh, don't be silly!" snapped Tom, who, truth to tell, was getting a bit short-tempered.

"I'm not!"

"Yes, you are!"

"Say, let's all get back to bed, and fight this out in the morning," suggested Frank, and they

took his advice, though it was but a troubled sleep that any of the four got the rest of that night.

Talking it over by daylight they decided that Tom's plan might not be so bad. Accordingly, they put it into practice.

"Clock!" suddenly exclaimed Sid, as he slid up behind Dutch Housenlager after chapel. "Tick-tock!"

"Tag. You're it!" quickly responded Dutch. "What's the signal?"

"You're not guilty, I see," spoke Sid, with a sigh.

"Of course not. What's the answer?"

"Someone took our clock last night."

"Oh, that battered chronometer? Say, do you know what I thought?"

"Couldn't guess it."

"That you were trying to initiate me into a new secret society, and that you were practicing the password—tick-tock!"

"Nothing doing. Say, Dutch, if you hear of anyone who has it, tip me off, will you?"

"I sure will," and then, to show how much in earnest he was, Dutch tripped Sid up and deposited him on the grass of the campus.

Nor was Tom, or his other two chums any more successful. Each time they tried the surprise plan on any suspect they received an answer that told they were on the wrong track.

And then, most unexpectedly, the clock came back, as it had done once before. Wallops, the messenger, brought it.

"I found it down in the furnace room," he explained. "It was on top of one of the boilers."

"Well, for the love of tripe!" cried Tom. "How in the world did it get there?"

"Our unknown visitor put it there," declared Frank. "Maybe he thought we were on his track, and he took this method of getting rid of the damaging evidence."

And they had to let it go at that—at least for the time being, for all their inquiries came to naught.

"Everyone who wants to try for the varsity eight come down to the river this afternoon," was the notice Captain Simpson posted on the bulletin board the next day. He and the coach had had a conference, and it was decided to try and definitely settle on the crew for the first boat. Then the second choice could be made, and some practice races arranged.

In order to be absolutely fair, Mr. Lighton and Mr. Pierson shifted about those who had been rowing together. I mean Tom and the seven lads with whom he was more closely associated than with any others—Sid, Phil, Bricktop Molloy, Frank, Holly Cross, Dutch, and Kindlings. Jerry was kept as coxswain in the new

boat, but Tom, Phil, Holly and Dutch were sent out in the old one, with Bean Perkins for steersman, while four lads who had not been given much practice were imported into the new shell with Frank, Sid, Kindlings and Bricktop Molloy.

"Now, boys, see what you can do!" urged the coach.

It was the first time the new shell had been tried, and it was found fully up to expectations. But it was a little differently made from the old one, and this made the lads a bit awkward in it. However, they rowed fairly well, though in a short trial race the old shell came out ahead.

"We'll do some more shifting," decided Mr. Lighton, and he and Mr. Pierson tried different combinations, but still separating the eight lads who had rowed together from the start.

This was kept up for some days, the lads all, meanwhile, being on training. But when a week had passed, and the old and new boats had seasawed back and forth, first one winning and then the other, Mr. Lighton shook his head in doubt.

"Something is wrong," he said. "We'll never be able to pick a varsity crew of either of them. We need a consistent winner."

"That is right," agreed Mr. Pierson. "Why not try the same eight you had at first—the four lads whom I coached this Summer, and their four

intimate friends? I fancy they would do better together in the new boat."

"We'll try it," assented the coach.

The result was an improvement at once. Even with the awkwardness of the new shell as a handicap, Tom and his seven friends at once opened water between their craft and the other one. And it was not surprising when you consider that they had had considerable practice together, and had played baseball and football through several college seasons.

"I think that's the varsity crew all right," declared Mr. Pierson, after watching the test.

"I agree with you—unless something unforseen occurs," said Mr. Lighton. "Now we must give some attention to the others in the fours, singles and doubles."

Practice in these craft had been going steadily on, and in time the crews that were to try to make Randall the champion were picked, subject, of course, to change, a number of substitutes being arranged for.

Word came that the Boxer Hall and Fairview varsity crews in the different shells were doing hard work. They had the advantage of not having to pick new and somewhat green crews. But the spirit of Randall was not affected by this.

"Now, boys!" exclaimed Mr. Lighton one afternoon, when the two eights had gone out for

a practice race. "I want you to do your best. Row hard! Try to imagine you're in a race. Row hard, everybody!"

"There may be a race if those fellows will consent to a brush with us," said Bricktop to Frank, as he looked down the river and saw the Boxer Hall eight approaching. "I wonder if we can chance it—to see which of our boats would win."

"I guess so," assented Frank.

"Silence in the boat!" cried Coxswain Jackson. "Save your breath to row with!"

"Sure he's getting to be a regular fussing martinet!" declared Bricktop, with a smile.

"Silence in the boat!" commanded Jerry again, and he meant it. Meanwhile the Boxer Hall eight came sweeping on. Would she give Randall an impromptu race?

CHAPTER XXVII

A BRUSH WITH BOXER

"WHAT do you think about it, boys?" called Mr. Lighton, from the launch where he and Mr. Pierson were sitting to do the coaching as they glided along. "Do you want to try it?"

"Sure thing!" answered Tom.

"Of course," assented Pete Backus, from the second eight.

"All right. Just row along then, and don't make any allusion to a race," advised Mr. Lighton. "If they want to pick up and come in, let them. Only—don't let them win!" he added, significantly. "Even if it is only a friendly brush."

"Let them win! I should say not!" declared Frank. "Be ready to pick me up quick now, fellows, when Jerry gives the word to spurt."

"Aye, aye, sir!" echoed Bricktop Molloy, from his position behind the stroke oar.

"And say, we don't want to let those fellows do us, either," went on Percy Pineford, coxswain of the second eight. "Let's beat the varsity and Boxer Hall, too."

"If we can," remarked Harry Chapin, who was at stroke.

"We can if you'll pull hard enough and fast enough." retorted the coxswain.

"Naturally. That's as easy as *pons asinorum* to say, but not so easy to do," commented number six—Billie Burden.

"Say, if you lads want to have any breath left for rowing you'd better stop talking," commented the coach, and after that there was silence in the varsity as well as in the second eight.

On came Boxer Hall, and not a Randall lad but envied their long, powerful stroke, so evenly done, and with such seeming power back of it. But Boxer Hall had been turning out winning crews for several years, and they had had much practice.

But, with all that, as Mr. Lighton and Mr. Pierson watched the two crews of Randall, out of whose numbers they hoped would come a varsity winner, the head coach remarked:

"Our boys do very well."

"Very well indeed," responded the Cornell man. "In fact I like their stroke better than that of Boxer Hall's. It is likely to last longer, and is not so tiring. Our boys feather better, too."

"Yes, thanks to your instruction this Summer to Tom Parsons and his three chums. Four good

rowers in a boat help to put it in the champion class."

If it was the intention of Boxer Hall to indulge in a race with our friends the river champions gave no intention of it at this time. They rowed on slowly, being some distance down the stream. The water was wide at this point, and there was room for several craft abreast, even with the long oars in the outriggers which set well out over the gunwales.

"Watch out for a sudden spurt," advised Frank, in a low voice to Jerry, who nodded in his coxswain's seat, and got the tiller ropes in a firm grasp.

Boxer Hall was known to be foxy, and if she could creep up on her rival, and, by a sudden increase in the stroke, gain such an advantage that Randall would find it hard to overcome the lead obtained, it would look as though our friends were outclassed. But there were wise boys at Randall, too.

The two Randall eights—the old and the new—had separated to allow Boxer Hall to come between them, if it was her desire to have a friendly brush. At first it seemed as though Boxer would decline, but, at the last moment, the course of the boat was changed, and she shot straight for the open water between the other two craft.

"Now for it!" murmured Jerry in a low voice. "Be ready, fellows!"

Hardly had he spoken when, at a shout from their coxswain, the Boxer rowers suddenly increased their stroke. They had waited until almost on even terms with the other two boats, and evidently hoped to catch our friends unawares.

But they reckoned without their host, for Jerry and his fellow coxswain gave the order to increase, and the sixteen lads responded nobly.

Only for an instant did Boxer Hall hold her advantage. She did shoot ahead, but in a moment her two rivals were on even terms with her, and there they hung for more than a minute.

"Well, it didn't work—did it?" called Jerry over to Pinky Davenport, who had succeeded Dave Ogden as coxswain of the Boxer eight.

"What didn't work?" asked Pinky, innocently.

"Oh, you didn't jump us," and Jerry laughed, for he saw by the confused look on his rival's face, as well as on the countenances of the others that their little trick—fair enough in its way—had been discovered.

But if Randall hoped to have matters all her own way, or even remain on even terms, she was much mistaken. For a time the impromptu brush had all the appearances of a real race, and the three boats seemingly tried as hard to win as

though the championship of the river depended on it.

Then the second eight began falling behind. The lads made a gallant effort to keep up, but the grind was too much for them.

"It's up to us now!" declared Jerry, in a low voice. "I'm going to push you fellows!" and he set the stroke at a heart-breaking pace.

His lads stood the "gaff" for a while, and then, noting the distress on the faces of several, Jerry, much against his will, had to lower the rapidity of the stroke.

Boxer Hall had held pace with her rival, giving them stroke for stroke, and now as Pinky saw his opponents in distress, he called for a quick spurt. And to the credit of Boxer Hall, be it said that her men responded in excellent style. They kept up the pace until, in a swirl of water, they had passed the varsity Randall eight, leaving that and the second craft behind. And then, to show that they had their nerve with them, the Boxer Hall rowers did not let up for another minute, sending their craft on at racing speed, even after they had won, and Randall was resting on her oars, completely "tuckered out."

It was a bad beating for Randall, and the faces of the two coaches as they came up in their launch showed the disappointment they felt.

CHAPTER XXVIII

FAINT HEARTS

"PRETTY punk; wasn't it?"

"Regular ice wagon as far as we were concerned."

"I didn't think they had that spurt in 'em."

"And yet we seemed to be rowing pretty well. I guess it takes more than one season to make a winning eight."

Silence followed these discouraging observations on the part of the four inseparables as they sat in their room the evening following the beating of the first and second shells by the Boxer Hall crew. There had been a meeting of the coaches with the Randall rowers immediately after coming off the water, and several plans had been talked over, involving a shifting of the crews. But in the end it was decided to wait another day or so.

There was no disputing the fact that Randall had expected at least the varsity boat to keep up to, if not beat, their rival. And they had failed. It was a bitter pill to swallow, with the time of the regatta so close at hand.

"It sure was rotten," said Tom musingly, as he sat staring vacantly at nothing. No one took the trouble to comment on his last remark. They had about exhausted their stock of bitter reflections and observations.

"Something's got to be done," went on Tom. Still no one answered him. The fussy little alarm clock ticked on, as though trying to be cheerful in the midst of all that gloom. It was as though it said:

"Cheer—up—I'm—here—
You'll—win—next—year!"

"I wonder what we can do?" Tom mused on.

Sid shifted uneasily in one of the easy chairs. Phil duplicated in the other. Frank turned to a more comfortable position on the old sofa, thereby bringing forth creaks, groans and vibrations of protest from the ancient piece. Tom was trying to get used to an old steamer chair, that had been picked up, with other relics, at an auction held by a retiring senior the previous June, but as the chair had lost one leg, which had been replaced by part of a Turkish rocker, and as the foot-rest had, in some former day, been broken off and put back upside down, Tom's effort to be at ease was more or less of a failure.

"Something has got to be done!" went on the pitcher. Once more the silence.

"Say, for the love of tripe!" Tom finally burst out. "Have none of you any tongues?"

He sat up so suddenly that the steamer chair, probably rotted by too much salt air on many voyages, collapsed, letting him down with a bump, and raising a cloud of dust from the old rug.

"Good!" cried Phil.

"See if you can do it again," urged Sid. "Frank had his head turned, and didn't see it all."

"Yes, do," begged the Big Californian, chuckling.

"Humph!" grunted Tom. "I thought I'd make you find your tongues somehow—you bunch of mourners!" and he limped across the room, to lean against the mantle, surveying the wreck of the chair.

"Hurt yourself much?" asked Phil, solicitously.

"A heap you fellows'd care," was the retort.

"Think you can row?" Sid wanted to know.

"What's the good of rowing if Boxer walks away from us like that?" demanded Tom, fiercely. "That's what I've been putting up to you fellows all evening, and you never opened your mouths. We're going to lose, I can see that. What's the good of trying?"

He was so bitter—it was so unlike Tom's usually cheery self—that his chums looked at one another in some alarm. As the pitcher went to

the bathroom to get some arnica for a slight bruise that had resulted from the chair's collapse, Sid murmured:

"I guess Boswell has gotten on his nerves."

"How Boswell?" asked Frank.

"Ruth," Sid further enlightened him.

"Don't you believe it," broke in Phil. "Sis wouldn't have anything to do with Bossy, while Tom was around."

"Talking about me?" suspiciously demanded the tall pitcher, entering the room at that moment.

"Oh, nothing serious," replied Phil, coolly. "We were just wondering what gave you the grouch."

"Grouch! Wouldn't anyone have a grouch if he'd practiced in the shell all Summer, and rowed his heart out, only to be beaten by Boxer—and not in a regular race, either? Wouldn't he?"

"You're no worse off than the rest of us," declared Frank, sharply. "We feel it just as badly as you do, Tom."

"You don't act so. You've been sitting here as mum as oysters!" came the bitter retort. It was the nearest in a long time Tom had come to a breach with his chums.

"What was the good of talking?" asked Sid. "Talking and shooting off a lot of hot air isn't going to make the varsity eight the head of the river; is it?"

"No, but you might find some way of doing it if you said something, instead of acting like Sphinxes," snapped Tom.

"I wonder if that chair can be fixed?" broke in Phil, anxious to turn the subject, for matters were being strained to the breaking point. "You sure did come down with an awful crash, Tom. Poor old chair! I'm glad it wasn't one of our good ones."

"Good ones!" cried Tom, who had bid in the steamer affair at the auction, much against the wishes of his chums. "Say, this has those other ancient arks beaten a mile," and stooping over he began trying to solve the twisted puzzle of the arms, legs and foot-rest that seemed to have gotten into an inextricable tangle.

"Oh, I give it up!" he cried, after several unsuccessful efforts. "We'll let one of the janitors play doctor," and he laughed.

"That sounds better!" exclaimed Phil.

"It would sound better if we had won to-day," went on Tom. "Why in the name of the binomial theorem couldn't we?"

"The answer is easy," spoke Frank. "They've had more practice than we have, they pull better, they have more power; three things that they excel us in. What's the result? Power, practice and skill added together equal a win."

"But isn't there any way we can get those three things?" demanded Tom fretfully.

"Next year, maybe," assented Phil.

"We've got to get 'em this year!" cried Tom, smiting his open palm with his clenched fist. "I won't admit we can't get 'em. We've got to beat Boxer Hall and Fairview, and we've got to get in condition in the next two weeks! Do you fellows hear? We've got to double up on our work! We— we——"

"Hear! Hear!" broke in the voice of Bricktop Molloy, as he entered the room at that moment. "What's all the row about? Tommy, me lad, you're getting to be a regular orator, so ye are!"

CHAPTER XXIX

THE REGATTA

"COME on in, Bricktop, and help us settle the row," invited Sid.

"Row! I should say so!" cried the red-haired lad. "Who's been breakin' up th' furniture?" and he dropped into his broadest brogue.

"Tom here," laughed Frank. "He isn't satisfied with the way the eight rowed to-day."

"Faith! an' I guess none of us are," replied Bricktop. And then the five students fell to discussing the matter from all viewpoints. Presently Holly Cross dropped in, and then Kindlings, so with nearly the whole varsity crew present the room was well filled.

There were opinions *pro* and *con,* there were periods of doubt, to be succeeded by others of some hope. And the result of it all was that they decided they had underestimated Boxer Hall's prowess, and would have to "perk-up" and do more and harder practice in the time that was left.

Communicating this decision to Mr. Lighton

the next morning, the lads found that he agreed with them.

"Mr. Pierson and I have talked it over," he said, "and we have come to the conclusion that to make a shift in the varsity eight now would be fatal. We must stand or fall by what we have. It is too late now. And, mind you, I am not so sure that even if there was more time that I would make a shift. I'm certain, in my own mind, that we have a championship boat. Now it's up to you lads to confirm my belief in you."

"And we will!" cried Tom, a sentiment that was echoed by his chums.

Then began at Randall a period of hard and exacting practice, such as had never been known before. The two coaches were fairly overworked, for by this time the first of the football squads was beginning to form. Many of the rowing lads were to play on the gridiron, but they were cautioned only to do light practice until after the regatta, as it would not do to have them overtrained.

The weather was exceptionally warm that September, just right for rowing and a little too close for heavy football work, so in one way Randall had an advantage as regards her crews. It was an advantage, though, shared by her rivals, for both Boxer Hall and Fairview had made up their separate minds to be champion of the river.

Boxer Hall, to be sure, now held this title, having defeated Fairview in the annual water sports in the Spring. But now with the new triple league formed, the title of "champion" was more or less uncertain. Not until this Fall regatta could it be definitely settled.

It had been decided to follow the same rules and customs as obtained between Boxer and Fairview. That is, there were to be a certain number of races—singles, doubles, the four, and the eight-oared shells, and the count was to be as follows:

A total of twenty points was decided on. Winning the eight-oared contest would count ten, the single shells would add two points, the double would count as three and the four would secure five. So that it can easily be seen that the winning of the eight-oared race meant much. Of course if one college should come out ahead in the singles, doubles and four-oared races she would have ten points, and should another win the eight, the score would be tied. But the possibility of this was remote.

In addition there was to be a tub race, which would not count in the championship, but for which several prizes were offered.

But if Randall worked hard, so did her rivals. From the other two colleges came news of cross-country runs for the improvement of the wind of the rowers. The training was reduced to a more

scientific basis. It was even rumored that Boxer Hall had imported a well-known physical instructor to assist the coach. And Fairview had summoned a number of old graduates, who had made their marks while at college, to assist in turning out a championship crew or crews.

Though the other races were regarded as important, most of the interest centered in the eight. Little was heard but about this shell, which in a way, perhaps, was unfair to the other rowers, who were practicing faithfully.

Much was heard about the advantage Boxer Hall and Fairview possessed, in that they had been rowing on the river for years. In a measure this was true, and Randall was under somewhat of a handicap in this respect.

Yet, in another way, it was a good thing, for Randall came into the game fresh, without any preconceived notions, and her boys had learned what they knew from the ground up. They were not hampered by college traditions as regards a certain stroke, and Mr. Lighton and Mr. Pierson had developed a logical one—differing somewhat from either Boxer Hall's or Fairview's—a combination of the two, modeled after the famous Cornell stroke.

And how Tom and his chums did work, train and practice! Lessons suffered in a way, but the lads were well enough along in college now to

know that they could make them up that Winter. And Dr. Churchill, bless his big heart! Dr. Churchill was not too inquiring. On one occasion Prof. Emerson Tines went to the head of the school to complain that he would have to condition a number of his Latin pupils unless their work showed improvement.

"And most of them, my dear Dr. Churchill," he said, "are of the boating class. A lot of foolishness—a mere waste of time. It was bad enough with baseball and football, but now that rowing has started, it is worse than ever. I wish those old graduates had never made their gift!"

"Tut! Tut! My dear Professor!" remonstrated Dr. Churchill. "Rowing is a form of exercise that develops muscles never brought to the owner's attention in any other way. I have been reading up on the subject since the eleven has taken to the shell, and I find that the ancient Romans, in their galleys, had rowing down to a perfection rarely attained to-day. It is an ancient and honest sport, and I'm sure I hope our nine will win the regatta," and then, good old soul, unaware that he had mixed the football and baseball squads most woefully with the crew, turned to his work on his dictionary, which to-be-famous work had progressed as far as the Cha. to Dem. volume, and bade fair to be completed in about fifty years, but Dr. Churchill did not think of that.

The chums were all tired enough this night to sleep, as Sid put it, without being rocked. They had retired early, for there was to be sharp practice the next day.

Lessons had been gone over, with as much attention as it was possible to concentrate on them, considering all that was going on, the alarm clock had been relieved of the "toothpick in its appendix," as Tom remarked, and it was cheerfully ticking away.

"Queer about that time the clock disappeared, when someone came in our room, and you took him for me; isn't it, Tom?" asked Sid, as he got his shaving apparatus in shape for quick use the next morning.

"It sure is. We've never had another visit from the unknown."

"And I hope we don't," put in Phil.

"Say, did you hear the latest?" asked Frank, as he untied the string of his shoe.

"No, is there going to be another shift in the varsity boat?" asked Phil.

"No, but a lot of the fellows have been missing little things from their rooms; scarf pins and the like. And the funny part of it is that it's all on the next floor of our dormitory. A regular epidemic, one of the fellows was telling me."

"Have we a kleptomaniac among us?" demanded Sid.

"Maybe it's one of the new janitors," suggested Tom. "There's one that has a bad eye."

"Well, as long as they stay off this floor, we'll be all right," asserted Sid. "Only we'd better keep our valuables locked up."

"Anyhow, they can't take the old chairs and sofa," remarked Frank with a chuckle. "They're too heavy."

It seemed to be Tom's fate to see the end of the little happening, as it had been his to note the beginning. Late that night he was awakened by a noise in the main apartment. At first he paid no attention to it, and then, as he heard the rustle of papers, he thought of the time he had followed, as he thought, Sid, in the dark, cold corridors.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed to himself, as he sat up without making the bed creak. "He's at it again! And this time I'm going to find out who it is!"

"Softly he crept to the door of his room. He saw the same white-clad figure as before, standing near the window. This time he knew it was not Sid, although the two looked much alike. The only sound was the ticking of the alarm clock.

Then, as Tom watched, the figure approached the table once more. The change in the tone of the ticking of the clock told Tom what had happened.

"He's got our clock!" thought Tom. "Here is where I catch him red-handed, so to speak."

The figure glided from the door into the hallway, and Tom followed, pausing but a moment to make sure that his three chums were in their beds. From their opened doors the sounds of three different styles of breathing assured him of this. Then he glided on.

Once more he followed the white-robed figure until it ascended the stairs to the story above, but this time Tom was close behind when the door opened.

"Hold on there!" exclaimed Tom, as the portal was about to close, and reaching forward he laid his hand on the shoulder of a student. "I'll trouble you for our clock!" said Tom, sternly.

Then he got one of the surprises of his life. With a startled cry the lad he had grabbed turned about, and his widely opened eyes suddenly changed their expression—changed so queerly that Tom knew he had the solution of the mystery.

"A sleep-walker!" he gasped, as he recognized Harry Johnson, one of the Juniors who did not enter much into the sporting life of Randall. "He's been doing this in his sleep!"

"What—what is it—where—have I? Oh, I've been at it again!" gasped the lad as he was aroused. "I beg your pardon, Parsons. Hope I haven't done anything very bad this time."

"Nothing but our clock, old man. Are you in the habit of doing this?"

"Not often, though the spell does come on me once in a while. It's a relic of my childhood days. And so I went to your room and took your clock?"

"Yes. This is the second time. Do you recall the first?"

"Not in the least. And yet I must have done so if you saw me. Probably some night later I went down in the cellar with it and put it on the furnace. Say, I'm mighty sorry."

"That's all right. Better lock your door after this."

"I will. Come in, and tell me what a fool I made of myself."

Tom, who had on a warm bath robe this time, consented, and in a whisper related the details of the first occurrence. Johnson was contrite, and admitted that it must have been he who had taken the clock, though in his waking hours he recalled nothing of it.

"It must have been the tick that attracted me," he explained. "Well, I guess I'd better take some treatment. Have a glass of ginger ale?"

"Don't care if I do, though it's breaking training."

As Johnson got a bottle from a closet he uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Look here!" he called to Tom. "Where did these things come from?" and in the bottom of a little case, where the bottles had been, he pointed to a collection of things.

"By Jove!" cried Tom. "I've solved the other mystery! You've been taking this stuff in your sleep!"

And so poor Johnson had. There was found all the articles missing from the rooms of various students. Johnson had, in his sleep, entered and taken them, concealing them in a closet, and, in his waking hours, forgetting about them. They were returned the next morning, with suitable apologies, and the matter was quietly dropped, for the students all understood how it could have happened. Johnson consulted a doctor, and was soon cured of his propensity to night wanderings.

"Well, I'm glad I solved the mystery, since I started it," remarked Tom the next morning.

Day after day passed, and the crews of the eights, as well as the other rowers, fairly lived on the river. The weather was remarkably fine, which was in their favor. Day after day the practice and training were kept up, and the coaches were faithful. A number of the old graduates who had been instrumental in providing the gift, came to Randall, and offered suggestions, some of which, being valuable, were adopted.

And then the natural result followed all this

hard work. The time of the eight, especially, began to improve. The boys rowed with more snap and vigor. They could stand the "gaff" better, and when Jerry Jackson, sitting crouched up in his coxswain's seat, called for a spurt, there were not so many "bellows to mend" in the shape of panting lads, as there had been.

"We're coming on!" cried Mr. Lighton proudly, at the close of an exciting brush between the first and second boats one day, when the varsity had won. "We're coming on!"

"If we can only keep it up," breathed Frank, who, being captain of the eight, as well as stroke, felt his responsibility.

"Oh, we'll do it, old man," declared Tom, and he succeeded in infusing some of his spirit into his chums. The faint hearts of the weeks before had become strong.

"But you boys needn't think you are going to win!" declared Ruth, when the four lads called on the four girls about a week prior to the date set for the regatta. "We have a championship crew in the eight, if nowhere else."

"Never!" cried Tom. "We're going to win the eight if we lose everything else; eh, fellows?"

"That's what!" his chums chorused.

"Anyhow, I'm glad of one thing," remarked Ruth, in a low voice to Tom, "Phil is so interested in this rowing game that he hasn't said a word

about my lost brooch. The other day I had on the new pin I bought to take its place, and he stared at it without making a remark. But, oh, Tom! I wonder if we'll ever find it?"

"It doesn't look so—not now," replied Tom, mournfully.

"Never mind," she consoled him. "We did our best."

"And lost out by a narrow squeak," thought Tom to himself, recalling the pawn tickets and other clues that had gone for naught. The police had not been able to get a trace of either Mendez or Blasdell, nor had the missing pawnbroker been found.

Finally the great day came. The last practice had been held, the lads, not only of Randall, but at the rival colleges, were "trained to the minute." The coaches had made their last appeals.

"Well, fellows, to-morrow tells the tale," said Frank to his seven chums, on the night before regatta-day. They had all met in the gymnasium for a final conference with Mr. Lighton, and had partaken of a light lunch.

"I'm as nervous as a cat," declared Sid.

"Don't you dare be!" exclaimed the captain of the eight. "But if you must be—be it now, and steady up for to-morrow. Now off to bed, and everybody sleep soundly."

And then regatta-day broke — calm, with a bright sun overhead, a hint of Fall coolness in the air that sent a little tingle through the blood — just the day for the races.

CHAPTER XXX

A CLOSE FINISH

"COME on now, fellows, hit her up again! All together and I want every man to sing! Ready now!" and Bean Perkins, the official cheer-leader, the "shouter" of Randall, signalled with his megaphone to his cohorts who were lined up near the boathouse, in and around which the various crews or single-shell men were gathered. "Tear it out now!" commanded Bean, and that glorious old Latin song—"*Aut Vincere, Aut Mori!*"—"Either We Conquer or We Die!" welled out over the river. It was the song that, time and again, had urged Randall on to victory. Would it once more?

"When are we going to start?" asked Tom, as he walked back and forth on the float, clad in rowing togs, as were a score of others, for a number of substitutes had been provided.

"Don't get nervous now, old man," advised Frank. "The shell will be in the water soon, and then we'll go down to the starting point. They're going to run off all the other races first, you know.

We're last. We've got more than hour yet. Better get on a sweater and a blanket, you might be chilly. You fellows do the same thing," he commanded, to his crew.

"I wish we were going in first—and get it over with," said Sid. "This waiting——"

"Say, cut it out!" cried Frank. "If you fellows want to have a case of nerves go off by yourselves somewhere. I want to watch the other races."

"I think our fellows have a good chance in the four," said Dan Woodhouse.

"We've got a good chance in everything—do you hear that, me boy?" cried Bricktop, in his rich brogue. "We're going to win everything! Just because you're in the eight you mustn't be selfish."

"I'm not, only——"

"Here comes our four!" interrupted Frank. "A cheer for 'em, boys!" and the echoes vibrated as the rallying cry went forth.

"Come on now, fellows," cried Bean, dancing about, the colors of Randall on his megaphone fluttering in the wind. "All yell—

"We can row you on the water,
We can race you on the land.
We can wallop you at football
And at baseball beat the band!

"That's us—Randall!" and the song and cry sent the members of the four-oared crew rejoicing on their way. They were Joe Jackson—Jerry's twin brother—Bert Trendell, Pete Backus and Sam Terry.

Early in the season Bean Perkins had been picked for the four, but he had not made good. Anyhow, he declared, he could help Randall more with yelling than any other way, and many agreed with him, for Bean was certainly a "shouter."

The river presented a gay scene. It was fairly covered with boats, until it seemed an impossibility that a race could be held. But the course had been marked off, and soon the boats of the officials would patrol the water-pathway and clear it.

Owing to the different lengths of the various races, several starting points had been selected, and the races had been timed so that the crowds could get from one to the other to watch the beginning if they desired. Of course the eight-oared race was the longest—three miles in this case, since the course of the river, narrowing as it did at several points, did not offer any longer course at any place available to the colleges. And three eight-oared shells take up considerable room abreast.

Launches, rowboats, and a sailboat or two, made up the craft holding the spectators. In addition the banks of the river, for a mile or more,

were gay with those who had come to witness the aquatic sports. The finish of all the races was to be at the Randall boathouse. This had been decided by lot, and our friends had been lucky. They were glad, too, since they could offer the hospitality of their new building to their rivals. And, in a way, Fairview and Boxer were glad, as their boathouses were rather ancient, and could accommodate only a comparatively few guests, while Randall's was large and roomy.

Fairview and Boxer Hall had their crews or individual rowers nearly all assembled. A few were not yet on hand, and some of the shells had not yet arrived. But all was in readiness for the three-cornered four-oared shell contest.

"Say, who's going to win?" challenged Tom of Ruth, for the girls, as you may well suppose, had been provided with choice places by our friends, where they could see all the finishes well.

"Who's going to win?" repeated Madge Tyler. "Why, we are, of course! See our colors?" and she flaunted them in Tom's face.

He looked at Ruth, and beneath a bow of the ribbon of the hues of Fairview, Tom caught a glimpse of his own college colors—a tiny bow. Ruth saw his glance, smiled and—blushed.

"You may win some, but the eight comes to us!" declared Sid.

"Oh, aren't we the sure ones, though!" mocked Helen Newton.

"Wait until it's all over,"advised Mabel Harrison.

"They're going to start!" suddenly cried Madge, as the three four-oared shells moved off down the stream.

"No, they're only going to the starting point," said Frank. "This is only a mile race, and they decided to row down to it instead of being towed, so as to get a little warm-up practice. I thought it would be a good thing for our crew to row down to the start, but Mr. Lighton says he has provided a launch for us, and the shell will be towed."

"I wish it was all over," murmured Tom.

"So do I," agreed Ruth, in a low voice.

"Come on now, boys! Another song!" demanded Bean Perkins, and the strains welled forth.

"Three cheers for Boxer Hall!" came the demand, and it was given with a will.

"Three big ones for Fairview!" called an adherent of that co-educational institution.

The four-oared crews, selected after much elimination work, were approaching their starting point. They were out of sight of those at the boathouse now, and it would be a little time before they appeared, rowing to the finish line.

The band began to play. There was gay

laughter and talk, and some nervous walking about by those lads who were to race next. The course had been cleared, though now and then some craft would trespass on it, to be hustled out of the way by the official boats.

It seemed an almost interminable time before the shout sounded:

"Here they come!"

There was a craning forward by all. Many who had fieldglasses used them. Ruth produced a pair.

"Who's leading?" begged Tom, in an agony of doubt.

"Fairview!" she replied.

"No, really?" and he almost grabbed the binoculars from her hands. "That's right," he admitted, grimly. "But our boys are pulling strong."

"If they can only win!" breathed Sid.

"Keep still!" commanded Phil, whose nerves, as were those of his chums, were at a tension.

Cheers began to drift along the shore, coming from the crowds lining the banks.

"Randall has pulled up!" cried Sid. "Our boys are rowing strong!"

"They've got a ways to go to finish," murmured Tom. "Oh, if they can last it out!"

Randall had a good lead now, and it was seen that Fairview was splashing badly. It developed later that two of her four-oared crew were over-

trained—they could not stand the heart-breaking strain at the finish.

"Come on, you Randall! Come on!" was the cry.

"Boxer's creeping up!"

"No, Randall's taken a spurt!"

Conflicting were the cries. The boats were see-sawing now. They were getting nearer and nearer to the finish line. The crowds leaned forward. Pandemonium broke loose. All three colleges were being cheered.

"It's going to be a tie!" yelled Phil, as he pointed to the Boxer and Randall shells, now almost bow and bow. "A dead heat! Fairview is out of it!"

"Come on, boys!" implored Tom, stretching out his hands as though to pull their shell forward.

There came a momentary hush. Then a great roar broke out.

"Boxer! Boxer Hall wins! Wow, look at that spurt!"

And, with sinking hearts, our friends watched their rival's shell dart over the line, a winner by a bare quarter of a length—but still a winner.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE TUB RACE

RANDALL'S adherents seemed stunned at first. They had been so sure of winning when the two fours swept up to the finish line, with Randall so close to Boxer, that, when victory was snatched from their very grasp, it seemed hard indeed. No one knew what to do, while the victors rested on their oars, justifiable smiles of triumph on their faces.

As for the losers, they hung their heads dejectedly, and that tears of mortification came into their eyes is not to their shame.

Then Tom Parsons found himself, and cried out:

"Three cheers for Boxer Hall! It was a good win!"

"That's right," echoed Sid Henderson.

And the cheers were given, none the less hearty because they came from the defeated side.

"Clear the course!" came the command from the judges' boat, and then came the formal an-

nouncement of Boxer winning. She had five points to her credit now.

The Fairview lads, in the bitterness of their hearts, for they realized that it was overtraining, and, in a way, over-confidence that had made them third, rowed up to the float, disembarked and walked away in silence—at least there was silence until Bean Perkins yelled:

"Three cheers for Fairview—she knows how to take a licking the same as Randall!"

And at once the river echoed the cheers.

"Well, you did us that time, Boxer!" went on Bean. "But our time will come—we're going to do you in the eight."

"Not if we know it," retorted Pinky Davenport.

"Oh, I'm so sorry—for you, Tom," breathed Ruth, as the tall pitcher stood close beside her on the balcony of the boathouse. "Does it bother you much?"

"Well, of course I'd like to have seen our four win," he replied, "but it doesn't bother me. It only makes me mad. We'll win that eight if we have to break every oar."

"Don't do that, Tom, old man," advised Frank, who heard this last. "Breaking an oar is worse than catching a crab. It will lose us the race sure. Be moderate."

"It's hard, after all the work we did," complained Sid.

"But look at it," put in Phil. "We beat Fairview, and that's something for a green crew to do."

"So we did!" exclaimed Sid, brightening up.

"Awfully sweet of you to remind us of it," said Madge, making a little bow.

"Oh—er—I didn't mean it that way," stammered Sid. "I didn't think."

"We'll forgive you," spoke Mabel, gently.

The single races were to have come next, but at the last moment it was discovered that one of the outriggers on the shell to be used by the Boxer Hall contestant was split, so a halt was called until he could get out one of the spare Randall boats. Then he was allowed a half hour to "get acquainted with his craft," this being generously allowed by the other two colleges.

"The tub race! Have the tub race now!" came the general cry, and as none of the other competitors wished to fill in the vacant time, and as the tub race would not count in points, it was decided to advance that on the program.

Accordingly, a number of washtubs, of good size, which had been provided, were brought forward. There were to be two contestants from each college, making six that would compete for first and second prizes, in the shape of silver cups.

Snail Looper and Dutch Housenlager were to

represent Randall, Dutch being the only regular rower who dared to brave the laughter of the crowd.

"Why shouldn't I?" he demanded, when questioned. "It'll be fun, and it will keep me from thinking of the big race. Besides, I think it will be good exercise, and I'm heavy enough to weight my tub down in the water, and that's a point. It won't turn so easily."

"Well, don't strain yourself, that's all," counseled Mr. Lighton. "We don't want any slip-up in the eight-oared race just because you want some fun."

"Oh, sure, I'll be careful!" promised Dutch, making a playful grab for Sid, who jumped back, thereby nearly upsetting an elderly gentleman who was sitting near the edge of the balcony to see the sports.

"Careful! Careful!" he exclaimed testily.

"Look out what you're doing, Dutch!" warned Tom. "He's one of the committee that gave us this rowing outfit. He'll get you down on his bad books if you don't look out."

"Just my luck!" cried Dutch, ruefully.

"Tub racers this way!" cried the starter. "Lively now!"

With but a single paddle to propel them on, the six lads, amid much laughter, took their places in the tubs. They were to paddle to a stake boat,

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THEN ONE OF THE LATTER TUBS COLLIDED WITH THAT OF DUTCH.

about half way across the river, turn there, and come back.

Anyone who hase seen a tub race knows how almost impossible it is to prevent the craft from whirling about. It doesn't seem to want to advance in a straight line. This was the case here, and when the lads started off it was only to go swirling madly about in concentric circles.

"Go the other way!" was shouted at them.

"Yes, reverse—you'll get dizzy!"

"Waltz me around again, Dutchy!" called Tom to Housenlager.

"You watch!" he shouted back. "I'm going to win!"

And it did seem as though he had a good chance. Whether it was his weight, or the way in which he used the paddle, was not manifested, but he certainly forged ahead.

He managed to turn the stake-boat first, though Snail Looper was a close second. Boxer Hall was out of it in this race, her two representatives seemingly not able to do much. But the two Fairview lads were pressing Dutch and Snail closely.

"Here I come! Here I come!" cried Dutch, as, amid increased laughter, the four lads neared the finishing line close to the float. But he did not see how near one of the Fairview lads was to him.

Then one of the latter tubs collided with that of Dutch. He uttered a surprised exclamation, turned to look, and his paddle slipped from his grasp.

"Come back here!" yelled he, making a grab for it.

Alas for Dutch! He over-balanced himself, or perhaps he was dizzy from the whirling. At any rate overboard he went with a splash.

"There! I knew something would happen!" cried Mr. Lighton, in vexed tones, as he saw the accident, and he hurried down to see that Dutch quickly changed to dry rowing togs, for the tub racers had worn their light garments.

Meanwhile Snail Looper came steadily on, finishing first, with a Fairview lad second.

"First win for Randall!" yelled a Boxer Hall adherent. "You fellows had better stick to tubs!"

"Wait!" murmured Tom. "This may put Dutch in just the right trim to pull the race of his life."

CHAPTER XXXII

BOSWELL'S CHANCE

"How about you, Dutch?" asked Tom eagerly, as he hurried up to his dripping chum, while others followed. The lads in rowing costumes did not hesitate to crowd close, while the other spectators, and there were many on the float, rather held back, for Dutch, in the exuberance of his mirth, was shaking himself like a Newfoundland dog, scattering drops all over.

"Fine and dandy!" was the answer of the big lad. "I just needed a bath."

"Look here!" exclaimed Mr. Lighton, somewhat sternly, "you had better get a good rub-down, and put on some dry togs. Have you any dry ones here?"

"No, but——"

"He can take mine, I guess I'm not going to get a chance to row," spoke Harry Morton, a Freshman, and he smiled gamely in spite of the disappointment he must have felt, for he had practiced hard, as a substitute.

"Good!" exclaimed Mr. Lighton, and he gave Morton a look that meant much. "Hurry now, Housenlager."

"Did you see me tumble in?" demanded Dutch, with a cheerful grin.

"Yes," assented Tom, somewhat sharply. "Quit your fooling now. We'll be in the race soon."

As the lad whose outrigger had delayed the race for single shells was not satisfied with the boat provided for him, another was gotten out. This further delayed matters, and it was decided to run off the doubles in the meanwhile. The singles would follow and then would come the great eight-oared contest, on which so much depended.

"Now boys, go in and win!" pleaded Mr. Lighton, to George Carter and Ben Blake, who were to uphold the honor of Randall in the doubles. "Remember about keeping on your course. If you are in your own water you're all right. Once you get off the course, and there's an accident, you'll have to abide by it. And pull hard! Save your breath for the spurt that is sure to come. And look out for Boxer. They're straining every nerve to beat us in every event to-day. They want to prove that it isn't possible to make rowers in a single season, and I want you to prove that it can be done. It's up to me—in a way—but I want you to do your share. Will you?"

"We sure will!" cried Blake. "Eh, Carter?"

"Surest thing you know," assented the other.

"Remember, Blake, you're the bowman," went on the coach. "Mind your steering. That new mechanical contrivance on this boat works very well. It's delicate, though. The least touch of your foot will shift the rudder. And give your orders so Carter can hear you, but don't waste too much breath doing it."

"Carter, mind your stroke. You may offset the change of the rudder if you pull too hard or too easy. Now go ahead—and may the Fates be kind to you. Randall needs those three points."

The three pair-oar boats moved off to the starting point and the crowd prepared to watch another exciting contest. Dutch had gone into the dressing rooms, accompanied by one of the trainers, who was directed to give him a rub-down. Tom followed, and as he went in he passed Boswell, who was also headed in the same direction.

"I guess they don't ever intend the singles to be rowed," remarked the rich lad, with some disgust in his tones. "Here I've been fiddling around just because that chump from Boxer Hall can't get a shell to suit him. Why didn't they look over their outriggers before they came?"

"Oh, they'll be ready soon," spoke Tom. Boswell had, as you may have assumed, been picked to uphold the Randall end in the singles. To do

him justice he had trained hard and well, and had been faithful. He was not a favorite, chiefly because he boasted so much, and talked so incessantly of his "private trainer," and other "possessions."

"I'm going to get a handkerchief for my neck," explained Boswell, as he approached his locker. "The sun's hotter on the back of my neck than I thought it was."

Tom passed on, paying no more attention to the single sculler. The tall pitcher was chiefly concerned to see that Dutch did no more "cutting up," and dropped the horesplay with which he was wont to amuse himself at all times.

"His monkey business may cost us the race," thought Tom, a bit angrily.

But Housenlager managed to contain himself, and was soon in dry rowing togs again. He and Tom lingered in the dressing rooms of the boathouse until someone called for the loser of the tub races to come out. Tom followed slowly, and, as he did so, he passed Boswell, who was restoring some of his garments to the locker, having tied a silk handkerchief about his neck. It was the same gaudy-hued one that had a strip torn from it, and, at the sight, Tom's memory went back to the hut on Crest Island, to Ruth's lost brooch, and to the robbery.

"Well, I hope we get off soon," remarked the rich lad. He was stuffing something into the

pocket of his trousers. The garments fell from a hook, and dropped to the floor. As they did so something fell from them and rolled over, stopping at Tom's feet. He stooped to pick it up, and to his surprise he saw that it was a gold brooch. His wonder grew as he noticed that it was exactly like the one Ruth had described to him as missing, and similar in pattern to the one he had often seen her wear—an old-fashioned pin, heavy and massive in design.

"Thanks," began Boswell, holding out his hand for it.

Tom held it back. He glared at Boswell.

"Where—where did you get that?" exclaimed Tom.

"Well, I don't know that it's any of your affair," was the rather cool reply.

"Well, I intend to make it mine! Do you know to whom that pin belongs?"

"Yes, to me, and I'll trouble you to hand it over."

"Wait!" exclaimed Tom. "Wait, Boswell. That pin isn't yours, and you know it."

"Well, I like your nerve! Whose is it?"

"Ruth Clinton's!" blurted out Tom.

"Ruth Clinton's?" cried Boswell. "She never saw that pin. I—I intended giv—look here, Parsons, what business of yours is this, anyhow? I know you and Miss Clinton are——"

"You let her name alone!" cried Tom, fiercely. "As for her never seeing this pin before—look here!"

He pressed on the secret spring in the back—a trick Ruth had taught him. A tiny panel of gold flew open, disclosing the girl's photograph beneath it.

"There!" cried Tom. "I suppose that got there by magic. Ruth never saw it; eh, Boswell? I don't know what to think of this—of you. You must have heard about the jewel robbery—of the missing Boxer Hall cups. And now you have this pin——"

"Stop!" cried Boswell. "If you dare, Parsons, say that I——"

"Ready for the singles! Boswell, are you there?" called a voice at the door of the dressing room. "Hurry out—Boxer wins the doubles!"

The two lads, almost ready to come to blows, started. This was news indeed.

"Randall loses in the doubles!" cried Tom, aghast.

"Yes," went on Joe Jackson, who had come to call Boswell. "Carter broke an oar near the finish line, and it was all up then. It's tough luck, for our boat was leading."

"Fate seems to be against us!" thought Tom, bitterly. Boswell was staring at him and at the gold brooch, which he still held.

"Look here!" blurted out Tom. "I know more than you think I do. I saw you and Mendez in the boat one day. You had a gold brooch then—you were talking about old-fashioned jewelry."

"Wait—stop!" burst out Boswell. "I'll talk to you about this. I'll tell you——"

"Boswell, they're waiting for you!" interrupted Joe. "The race is called. For the love of tripe win it! Randall sure is in the soup to-day. Win!"

"I will!" cried the rich lad. "I can't stop now!" he cried to Tom, as he hurried out. "You keep that pin. I'll explain later. The man I got it from may be around here yet!"

"You'd better guess I'll keep this pin!" murmured Tom. "As for an explanation, you'll have some tall talking to do to convince me. I begin to see how things are now!"

Boswell ran out. There was a cheer from the float—from the crowds along the river bank.

"Come on, Tom!" cried Joe. "You and your crew are next. Oh, for the love of Randall win that race! Boxer Hall has eight points now—the four and the double. But if we win the eight and the single we'll have twelve, and be the champions."

"Then we'll win!" cried Tom, desperately, as he clasped Ruth's brooch in his hand and raced out. As he came from the dressing rooms he heard Bean Perkins yelling:

"All together now, boys! The 'Conquer or Die' song, and sing it as if you meant it. Randall is nearing the finish!"

Blake and Carter, bitter over the unforeseen accident that had robbed them of victory, were getting out of their shell. Boswell and the others in the singles were being sent off after brief instructions. Tom looked at his rival, and many thoughts came to him.

The crowd was now so dense on the float, and on the stairway leading to the balcony, that Tom could not make his way up to tell Ruth the good news—that he had her brooch. He made the effort, but it was next to impossible.

"Come on, Tom!" called Frank, behind him. "Mr. Lighton wants the crew of the eight in the dressing room for a last conference. Oh, cats! But the time is getting close."

"Don't get nervous, you chump!" exclaimed Dutch. "Look at Kindlings, as cool as an ice-house."

Elation, worry, wonder and apprehension were Tom's mingled feelings as he followed his chums and the coach. What Mr. Lighton said he hardly comprehended. But the coach impressed on the lads the necessity for coolness, the need of a spurt at the right time, and then the keeping up of the stroke until the bow of the boat had crossed the finish line.

Boswell, rowing with the others to the start, was almost upset in his mind as was Tom.

"So, he thinks I stole that pin—all the jewelry, I expect!" he mused. "What can I do? What shall I do? I wonder where in the world Mendez is? If I could only find him——"

"Mind where you're going, Randall!" called a sharp voice, and Boswell changed his course, that had threatened to cut into the Fairview shell.

Boswell and the others reached the starting line. There they got into position, the last word was given, there was a moment of suspense, and the warning gun was fired. Then came the final signal, and they were off.

Three backs bent to the stroke, six oars took the water, there was a swirl of foam and bubbles. Tiny whirlpools formed at the ends of the spoons, and the single race was under way.

"Oh, if I can only win—if I can only win!" thought Boswell.

And the lads from Boxer Hall and Fairview thought the same thing.

It was half way to the finishing mark. Boswell was rowing well, and was maintaining the slight lead he had. Casting a glance over his shoulder to note his course, his eyes swept the crowd on the river bank, near which he was. A face seemed to stand out from among the others.

"Mendez! Mendez!" cried Boswell. "Men-

dez, go to the Randall boathouse at once! I need you there! A whole lot is at stake! There's a hundred dollars in it for you from me! Go, do you hear! The Randall boathouse! Get there as soon as you can! I'll meet you after this race! Do you hear?" and Boswell fairly screamed the words.

"Yes, senor, I hear," replied the Mexican. "I go," and he started off on the run, for Boswell's manner was such that it carried conviction with it. And then Boswell set himself to the race again. But he had hesitated just a moment—just a fatal moment—and the next instant, with the lads in them picking up their strokes, the Fairview and Boxer Hall shells passed him.

"I'm done for!" murmured Boswell.

CHAPTER XXXIII

MENDEZ EXPLAINS

"COME on, Boswell!"

"Row hard!"

"You've got to row!"

"It's your last chance!"

Thus his mates encouraged the Randall lad in the single shell, as the three craft swept on up to the finish line in front of the new boathouse. But it was not to be. Boswell pulled with all his strength. Never had there been seen a better exhibition on Sunny River, but it was too late. His little hesitation when he had called to Mendez—the excited state of his mind, in wondering at Tom's accusation—all contributed to his defeat. The slight delay was fatal.

"Oh, row! Row!" implored Bean Perkins. "Give him a song, fellows!" and that grand Latin chorus of the ancients pealed out.

But it was not to be. Fairview was leading, with Boxer second and poor Boswell third. And in this order they finished, giving Fairview her first win

of the day, and Boxer her first defeat. As for Randall, once more she tasted bitterness.

"Three cheers for Boswell!" called someone, and,though he was no favorite, no one could withhold from the measure of praise due him for his plucky effort. Few knew what had contributed to his defeat. Even his rivals, hearing him call to the man on the bank, only thought him shouting to some friend, and thought how foolish he was thus to waste his precious time and energy. But it was none of their business, and so they rowed on to defeat him.

"Never mind!" consoled Mr. Lighton. "You rowed the best you could, Boswell, I have no doubt. It was a fair race."

"I—I could have won," he panted, and there were some smiles from those who thought it but part of his usual boastfulness. But Boswell paid no attention to them. He was seeking out Tom Parsons, and the Mexican.

"Get ready for the eight-oared race now," directed some of the officials. "Randall, is your crew ready?"

"All ready," answered Mr. Lighton.

"Ready," answered Pinky Davenport, for Boxer Hall.

"All ready," assented Roger Barns, for Fairview.

Boswell made his way through the press of

rowers and spectators, whispered comments following him. But he paid no attention.

Into the dressing room he strode, where the crew of the eight were just finishing a little conference with their coxswain, Jerry Jackson.

"Parsons, a word with you!" exclaimed Boswell, rather haughtily.

"As many as you like—after the race," said Tom, coldly. He still held clenched in his hand the brooch. He made up his mind to get it to Ruth before he went off in the launch that was to take him and his mates to the starting point. He had no pocket in which to put it, he could not row holding it, and he wanted to conceal it from Phil.

"No, now!" snapped Boswell. "Something unexpected came up as I was on the course. I think it is due to me to allow me to explain how I came by that——"

"Here!" exclaimed Tom, anxious that Phil should not listen. "Make it brief. I can't understand what you have to explain, though."

"You'll soon know—someone else will explain, too. He will be here shortly."

"Ready for the eight! Ready for the eight!" came the summons from without.

"Get together, fellows!" called Captain Frank Simpson. "And for the love of Randall row as you never rowed before."

"Don't hang back when I call for the spurt," added the coxswain.

"Ready for the eight! Ready for the eight!" again came the summons.

"Come on!" ordered Frank once more, looking over to where Tom and Boswell were standing, apart from the others.

"Get a move on, Parsons" directed Dutch. "If we win you'll be the first over the line, being in the bow. Come on." Tom had again been made bow oar.

"No, wait a minute!" implored Boswell. "I want to say something, Parsons."

"Won't after the race do? I can't listen now. Besides I've got to give Ruth——"

"It's about her I want to explain. Hang it, man, it won't take a second."

"Is Boswell in there?" called someone at the door of the dressing room.

"Yes—yes!" eagerly assented the rich lad.

"There's a fellow out here wants to see you," went on one of the rubbers. "Some sort of a foreigner. Says you told him to come here and——"

"Yes! Yes! Let him in!" cried Boswell. "It's someone I want to see!"

There was a little stir about the doorway and a man strolled in.

"Senor Boswell," he began, "you have sent for me, and——"

"Mendez!" gasped Tom.

"Mendez!" echoed Sid, Frank and Phil.

"Yes, Mendez," spoke Boswell. "Now, Parsons, I think he'll tell you that I bought that brooch from him. Show him the pin!"

"I—er—" began the tall pitcher, and then realizing that concealment from Phil was no longer possible, he held out the trinket.

"Ruth's brooch!" cried her brother. "How in the world did you get it? What does it all mean?"

"It's a long story," said Tom. "We haven't time for more than a fraction of it. Boswell had the pin. He says——"

"I say I bought it of Mendez, and he'll tell you the same thing!" interrupted the rich lad. "Did I not?" and he appealed to the Mexican. "Didn't you bring this to me to-day?"

"Senor Boswell is right," assented the foreigner. "I have sold many things to Senor Boswell. He say for me to look for an old-fashioned brooch for him, like one his mother has, and he show me a jewel of the respected Mrs. Boswell, which I have also procure for him. I get this other one from Senor Blasdell, from whom I take over the take-care work on Crest Island."

"Blasdell!" cried Tom. "Did he sell you this brooch, Mendez?"

"The senor says what is correct."

"But where did *he* get it?"

"I don't know."

"Look here, Mendez," burst out Tom, "do you know anything about the Farson jewel robbery—about the Boxer Hall cups—about the pawn tickets? Do you?"

"On my honor, senor, no!" and the man bowed low. He seemed at ease, and to be speaking the truth.

"But why did you leave the island so suddenly?"

"Ah, senor, I will tell you. I will confess. In my country we do not—that is, we who are of my class—we do not consider it a crime to smuggle—ah, well, a few cigars. I was guilty of that here. I smuggle some here and I sell them in my little store on what you call—er—the edge, is it not?"

"The side," murmured Phil.

"Yes, I thank the senor. I sell smuggled cigars on the side. It is not a great crime, I think. But one day word comes to me in the hands of a boy from a friend, that the government of your country is about to squeeze me—am I right?"

"I guess you mean 'pinch'—arrest," suggested Sid.

"Yes, that is it. I am to be pinched—Oh, what a language! Now I have no desire to be pinched,

for what I, personally, do not consider a crime. So I flee—I vamoose. I go, and take all I can with me. Then, later, when it has all been blown up——"

"Blown over," suggested Frank.

"Blown over, yes, I thank you. When it is all blown over I come back. I have no more smuggled cigars. I am not in danger of being pinched. I come back to open my little store, and be the take-care man on Crest Island.

"As for the gold pin, some time after I leave, so that I may not be pinched, I meet in New York the Senor Blasdell. He greet me kindly and say to me do I not want to buy of him a gold pin. I deal in jewelry on the edge—I mean side—and I remember that Senor Boswell have commission me for an old-fashioned pin. I think I have just what he want. I buy it from Senor Blasdell, and bring it to Senor Boswell at his college here. That is all," and he bowed to all.

"That's how I got the pin," said Boswell, coldly, looking at Tom. "I hope you are satisfied."

"Of course," murmured Tom. "But I don't understand. Where is Blasdell? Where is that rascally pawnbroker? Where is the rest of the jewelry, and the Boxer Hall cups?"

"Say, what are you anyhow, Tom—a riddle reader?" demanded Dan Woodhouse.

"What is all this Chinese puzzle about, any-

how?" asked Jerry Jackson. "If we're going to row to-day——"

"Faith we'd better be gettin' at ut!" cried Bricktop, with a twinkle in his blue eyes.

"Where's the Randall eight?" cried the voice of Mr. Lighton. "Why aren't you out here? We're waiting."

"We're coming!" exclaimed Tom. "Fellows," he added, turning to the four of the crew who were not in on the secret, "We'll explain later. I'll see you after the race," he called to Boswell.

"As you please," was the cool answer.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE GREAT RACE

"ARE you all ready, boys?" inquired Mr. Lighton.

"My throat's as dry as a limekiln," said Bricktop.

The eight, in their shell, were at the starting point, having gone down in the launch, while the spider-like boat was towed. On either side of them were the Boxer and the Fairview eights, with their crews as eager to get off as were our friends.

"Take a slice of lemon," went on the coach, producing one, and a knife from his launch. "Anybody else have one? Hold the pieces in your mouth," he advised.

Several of the lads accepted bits of the citrous fruit.

"Are your oarlocks all right—and the stretchers?" went on the coach.

Everyone tested his own, and no complaint was forthcoming. Mr. Pierson, who had remained faithful to the last, said something in a low voice to Mr. Lighton.

"Yes," assented the head coach, adding: "Don't forget to keep your eyes in the boat, whatever you do. Your coxswain will watch the other craft, and tell you when to spurt. This is important—eyes in the boat and no talking. You've got to row!"

For the other crews, their coaches and advisers were speaking the last words to the nervous lads. From time to time those in the Boxer Hall or the Fairview eight looked over at their rivals. Randall was to take the middle course, an advantage that had come to them by lot.

Tom and his three chums wanted desperately to talk about the dramatic scene enacted in the boathouse just before they had started, but there was no chance. They had hurried away, and in the launch, on the trip down, Mr. Lighton held their attention. Tom had managed to slip up to Ruth, and hand her the brooch just before leaving. That she was surprised is putting it mildly.

"Oh, Tom! Where on earth did you get it?" she had cried. "I—I could hug you for this!" and her eyes sparkled.

"We'll postpone the hugging until after the race! Just cheer for our boat!"

"I will. Oh, Tom, my dear old brooch! Can't you tell me how you got it?"

"Not now—later—I haven't time. See you after the race!" and he had run off to join his mates.

"How much longer?" asked Frank, as he shifted himself on his sliding seat.

"Not much, I guess," replied Mr. Lighton, looking at his watch. "About——"

A shot boomed out from the starter's boat.

"There goes the warning gun," the coach interrupted himself. "A minute more. Take it easy at the start, boys. It isn't a hundred-yard dash, remember. The hard work will come at the end. Steady all—eyes in the boat—row hard —and—win!"

And, with these final words, Mr. Lighton steamed off in his launch, the other coaches also leaving their crews to themselves.

The race was to be down stream, and, in order to make an even start, the stern of each shell had been made fast to an anchored boat in the middle of the river. At the signal the retaining ropes were to be loosed, and the race would start. Eager ears waited for the final signal.

"Get ready boys!" called Jerry Jackson, his eyes on his watch, which he had fastened before him. "You've got about fifteen seconds more."

There were sharp intakings of breath, and the young coxswain, glancing at his crew, noted with satisfaction that the slight tendency toward nervousness, exhibited by some, had disappeared. They were all cool and eager.

Crack! came the report of the starting gun

On the instant the retaining cables were loosed, and twenty-four oars seemed to take the water as one. It was a good, clean, even start.

To bring the finish opposite the boathouse, it had been necessary to go down the stream some distance, and there were few spectators gathered there.

But such as were there gave forth a hearty cheer, and the yells of the three colleges were given in turn, for some loyal-hearted lads had sacrificed their chances to see the finish, that they might cheer the start.

"Steady, fellows, steady," counseled Jerry, in a low voice, as he noticed a tendency to hurry. "It isn't time to hit up the pace. They're both keeping even with us," he added.

Then began a steady grind. A leaning forward of the bodies, with hands well out over the toes, the dipping of the blades of the oars into the water, and then that tremendous pull of sixteen sturdy arms, shoulders and trunk—the pushing of sixteen muscular legs, the rising off the seats to get all the weight possible on the oar at the point of leverage where it would do the most good.

Over and over again was this repeated. Over and over again, with the eyes of seven of the men on the back of the man in front of him timing the

movement, and with the eyes of the stroke on the coxswain, to catch the slightest signal.

Stroke after stroke—movement after movement, one just like the other—twenty-eight to the minute, Jerry having started them off with that minimum.

And what Randall was doing, so was Fairview and Boxer Hall, in the same degree.

The first mile was passed, with the net result that all three shells were on even terms, albeit one or the other had forged ahead slightly, not because either one had quickened the pace so much consciously as that they had done so unconsciously, and there was, of course, a difference in the muscular power at times.

They were half way over the second mile—half the course had been rowed.

Frank Simpson, watching Jerry, saw the little coxswain shoot a quick glance toward the Boxer Hall boat, and then stiffen in his seat.

"Hit it up!" cried Jerry, and he gave the signal for a thirty-per-minute stroke. But, even as he did Frank, risking something by taking his eyes off the coxswain, looked across the lane of water.

He saw the Fairview boat shoot ahead, while, the next instant the Randall shell, urged onward by the increased stroke, tried to minimize the advantage gained.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE EIGHT-OARED VICTORS

"HERE they come, boys! Get ready!" yelled Bean Perkins, wildly waving his megaphone. "Here they come!"

"Oh wow!" shouted Joe Jackson. "For the love of Cæsar tell us who's ahead."

"It's hard to see from here. But I think——"

"Oh, who cares what you *think?*" interrupted a lad. "Don't give us any false information."

"Get ready boys!" cried Bean again. "The college cheer when they get opposite the old boathouse, and then the 'Conquer or Die' song. We've got to pull 'em on!"

All was excitement. A hundred voices mingled in expressions of hopes and fears. The rival college cheers blended into one riotous conglomeration of sound. The three shells were sweeping on to victory—victory for just one!

"Oh, Madge!" cried Ruth. "I daren't look. Here, you take the field glasses, and tell me who's ahead."

Her own college colors slipped from her dress unheeded, and there was disclosed the tiny knot of Randall's maroon and yellow.

"Ruth!" expostulated Mabel, as she pointed to the traitorous hues.

"I don't care!" replied Ruth, as her hand went to where her restored brooch was at her throat.

"Who's ahead?" demanded Helen Newton, as Madge peered through the glasses.

"Fairview!"

"What?"

"She is! She is! Oh, girls, Fairview is going to win!"

"Who—who is second?" demanded Mabel.

"Randall!" came the reply.

Then there was silence. The girls looked at one another. What they thought, who shall say?

On came the three shells. The cheers increased. There was a din of horns and rattles. The band played madly—no one knew what the tune was—and cared less.

"Steady all!" cried Jerry, as he noticed a tendency to quicken. "Steady all!"

On came the Randall shell. Just a little to her rear was Boxer Hall, struggling desperately and with breaking hearts to offset the disadvantage of overtraining and over-confidence. For that is just what it amounted to. It looked hopeless for them now.

As for Fairview, she had maintained the lead she had unexpectedly gained over Randall, and the eager—almost bursting—hearts in the boat hoped that the co-educational college could row it out unto the end. But there was no disguising the fact to themselves that they were rowing against such a rival as they had never before met.

For a moment after Jerry had given the word to increase the stroke, his chums thought that he would keep them on that for a hundred yards or so, and then hit up the pace still faster. But he did not. Instead, coolly and calmly, he glanced critically at the Fairview shell, and kept on at the same rate.

"Hang it all, why doesn't he give the word to spurt?" thought Frank, as his broad back rose and fell to the measured rhythm. "We can do it!"

But Jerry was a wise little coxswain. Not for nothing had he spied out the course, so that he knew every foot of it, and by marks previously noted, he could tell exactly how far they were from the finish mark.

Nearer and nearer to it came the eight-oared shells. Boxer Hall was struggling hard to pull up, but for once she had met her match—two, in fact, for it was easy now to see that the race, barring accidents, lay between Randall and Fairview.

"And, oh! May we win!" prayed Tom and his

chums. And they could not understand why Jerry would not put them at their limit. True, their hearts were pumping at an abnormal rate, their muscles strained as they never had before, and their breath came labored, and went out gaspingly.

And then, when Coxswain Jerry, with his eager eyes, saw a certain old gnarled tree on the river bank, and when he had noted that Fairview had added another stroke per minute, then and not until then did he give the word.

He had slid down into his seat, feeling the tiller lines as a horseman feels with the reins the mouth of his pet racer. Gently, as if the shell were some delicate machine, did Jerry guide her on the course. Now the time had come!

Up he sat, like one electrified. Through the megaphone strapped to his mouth came the words:

"Row, boys! Row as you never rowed before! Put all you can to the stroke. I call for thirty-three! Give it to 'em! Give it to 'em!"

It seemed as though the Randall shell was suddenly galvanized into action. Reaching forward over their toes, eight sturdy backs bent for the stroke. Then it came.

A pull that seemed to lift the frail shell from the water—a pull that strained on the outriggers —a pull that made the stout oars creak and bend! A stroke that sent the water swirling aft in rings,

circles, whirlpools and a smother of foam! A stroke that told!

"Row! Row!" screamed Jerry.

Daring another glance, Frank, at stroke, saw the Fairview boat seemingly at a standstill. But it was not so. It was that Randall had shot up to her.

From the shores, from the boathouse, from the other craft, came a riot of sound—shouts, yells, the tooting of horns, the clatter of rattles.

There was a veritable flower garden of waving colors. The shrill voices of the girls mingled with the hoarser shouts of the men and boys. Whistles blew, and dogs barked to add to the din.

"Row! Row!" Jerry fairly screamed.

"Pick it up, boys!" pleaded the Fairview coxswain. He had not thought that his rivals had this spurt in them.

"Can't you do it? Can't you get up to them?" begged Pinky Davenport, of his Boxer lads, and there were unashamed tears in his eyes as he made his last appeal. But Boxer was "all in."

"Now boys, now!" shouted Jerry. "It's your last chance! A hundred yards more—only three hundred feet! Row! Row! We must win."

"Don't let 'em pass us!" came from the Fairview coxswain. "A few strokes—only a few more!"

The boats were even! Pandemonium had now

broken loose. The band was drowned out by shouts. Ruth found herself hammering Madge on the back, and shouting—she knew not what—in her ear. Madge was crying—she did not know why.

As for the Randall lads, they were mere machines. There was no more thought left in them. They saw nothing, but each man in front of him viewed his fore-man's back—Frank could not see the face of Jackson, but he could hear his rasping voice.

"Row! Row!"

How Frank heaved! How he dug at the giving water at the end of his blade as though he would tear it from the river and fling it aloft in a rainbow arch.

And how Bricktop Molloy took up the stroke, his honest Irish face wet with sweat—his red hair plastered down on his forehead. Back and forth he bent. After him came Holly Cross picking up the stroke masterly—then Kindlings—good old Kindlings with something of the fire of his name in his sturdy muscles—then Housenlager—all the desire for horseplay gone from him. Then Sid, who had been shifted back to Number Three almost at the last moment. Then Phil, and then Tom.

And how they rowed! Surely the ancient gods—surely even Hercules at his twelve labors—

never toiled more Titanically than these eight rowers. No galley slave, chained to the oar, with the vessel on fire above him, with the shrieks of the dying in his ears, the stench of Greek fire in his nostrils, ever rowed more desperately.

"Row! Row!" screamed Jerry.

"Row! Row!" echoed Roger Barns.

The finish line was but a hundred feet away. Slowly, oh, so slowly, did the Randall boat creep up on her rival.

Now she was past! Another electric thrill went through Jerry.

"Row! Row!" he screamed, and his voice was hoarse. His hands, tense and gripped, were clasped so tightly on the tiller ropes, that afterward they had to loosen them for him. The muscles had gone dead, but he steered with the skill of a veteran.

It grew black before Tom's eyes. He felt that his lungs were bursting. Frank knew that if he dipped the oar in the water again he would not have strength to pull it out.

But, somehow he did!

And then with one last spurt, a spurt that seemed to wrench the very roots of their hearts, a pull that seemed to tear their very muscles loose, the lads in the Randall shell sent their boat over the finish line a winner—a winner by half a length —a winner! They were the eight-oared victors!

And, as they realized this—as it came to them —their eyes that saw not lighted up—their faces, seamed and lined with the contracted muscles, broke into smiles, and then Tom toppled over on his oar, and Frank fell weakly back on Molloy.

"Easy there, me lad, easy," panted Bricktop. "It's all over. You collapsed at the right minute! Oh, wow, but I'm thirsty!"

Jerry Jackson was struggling with the tiller lines wound about his nerveless hands. Ready chums loosed them, and helped him from the shell onto a boat, the crew having recovered sufficiently to put their broad blades out on the water to steady the shell.

And then, following the hush that came after the hysterical outburst which greeted the winners, came floating over the heads of the great throng:

"*Aut Vincere! Aut Mori!*"

But Randall had conquered, though she had nearly died.

Somehow the crew heard the cheers for themselves, for their coach and for the plucky little coxswain. Somehow they managed to cheer Fairview and Boxer Hall, and then they were hurried into the dressing rooms.

"I knew you could do it! I knew you could do it!" cried Mr. Lighton, capering about like a boy.

"I knew we could make a rowing crew in one season with the material we had."

"Faith, an' ye did, me lad!" declared Bricktop, while Housenlager feebly punched Tom in the ribs, a bit of horseplay that our hero was too tired to resent.

"Someone to see Mr. Parsons!" called Wallops, the college messenger, who was helping out at the boathouse. He peered into the anteroom of the dressing apartments.

"I can't see anyone now," declared Tom. "Who is it?"

"He says his name is Farson, and——"

"The jeweler!" cried Tom. "Show him in!" and he came from under a shower and grabbed up some garments. "There must be something doing!" he added to Sid and Phil, who had heard the words.

Somewhat bewildered by the athletic throng about him, the jeweler entered.

"Where are you, Mr. Parsons?" he asked.

"Here!" cried Tom. "What is it?"

"Everything! I have just received word from the police that they have arrested that pawnbroker. He has all the Boxer Hall cups, and most of the other jewelry. Nearly everything is recovered. All but that old-fashioned brooch you told me about. That he says he never had."

"And he's right," added Tom. "I recovered that. But who took the things?"

"Blasdell. The island caretaker took them out of my box when the boat landed on the island, and disposed of them. Then he hid the pawntickets in the shack, taking away the brooch he had previously hidden there.

"Blasdell has been arrested too. He has made a full confession. He and the pawnbroker have been in with a bad set, and were planning other crimes. But I will soon have nearly everything back. I thought you might be glad to know, so I came here as soon as I heard. I had to wait until after the race, though."

"We are glad to hear the news," spoke Frank. "So Mendez is not in it after all."

"No, the confessions of the others completely clear him. I must go tell the Boxer Hall boys the good news."

"And it is almost as good news to us as to them," said Tom, as he went in to finish dressing.

The regatta was over. Randall, in spite of heavy odds and in spite of losing all but one race, was proclaimed champion of the Tonoka Lake League.

"But we'll do you next year!" prophesied Pinky Davenport. "I think the loss of our cups was a hoodoo to us."

"Maybe," admitted Tom. "But next year is—

well, next year, and we're not greenies any more."

"I guess you never were," admitted his rival.

"And now let's go see the girls, and tell them how sorry we are that we beat them," proposed Sid.

If the girls felt badly they did not show it much.

"What I can't understand," said Phil, a little later, when he and his chums, and his sister and her chums were talking it all over at a little supper in Haddonfield, "what I can't understand is how Boswell knew Ruth had lost her pin, and wanted to give her another."

"He didn't know it—stupid!" exclaimed Ruth, with a blush. "Only Tom knew it."

"But Boswell was going to give you a pin."

"Oh, can't a fellow give a girl a pin without knowing that she has lost one or you making a fuss over it?" asked Sid.

"But—but——" faltered Phil.

"He heard that I was fond of old-fashioned jewelry," explained Ruth, blushing, "and I suppose, instead of—er—well—say candy, he hunted up an old-style pin. He had bought one for his mother from Mendez, and wanted one for me. It was lucky that Blasdell did not pawn my pin with the other stuff. Instead he sold it to Mendez, who, in turn, sold it to Mr. Boswell, and Tom—well, Tom did the rest."

"And you were without grandmother's pin all

that while, and never let on!" cried Phil. "Oh, you're a sly one, Sis!"

"And the colored handkerchiefs, and Boswell were useless as clues," went on Sid. "They were just false alarms. But I wonder why Mendez was so anxious to see Boswell that day we went on our little picnic?"

"Mendez explained that," said Tom. "He had had some intimation that his selling of smuggled cigars was likely to be dangerous, and, as Boswell had bought some he wanted to talk about it, and get his advice. That was all. It seems that when Boswell and the Mexican were together on the island one day Mendez cut his finger and Boswell tore off a strip of the silk handkerchief. Boswell told me that."

"And I guess that explains everything," remarked Phil. "I want some more ice-cream. We've broken training now, you know."

And so the merry little party feasted and laughed and softly sang their college songs until the girls protested that they must get back, or Miss Philock—well, various opinions were expressed about that lady.

"Stop that infernal clock!" grunted Tom, a little later, as he lay half asleep on the old sofa in the common room.

"Stop it yourself," murmured Phil, sprawled in one easy chair, while Frank occupied another. Sid

had declared himself done up after the race, and had gone to bed. From his room he murmured in a sleepy voice:

"Sounds like Jerry calling—'Stroke! Stroke! Stroke!" doesn't it?"

"Cut it out!" said Phil. "I don't want to see an oar for six months again."

"It will be pigskin punts from now on," spoke Tom, as he returned from jabbing a toothpick into the clock's interior, and turned over to doze again.

"And then good old Winter!" exclaimed Frank. "I say, fellows, what's the matter with getting up some iceboat races," and he galvanized into uprightness.

"Talk about it to-morrow," sleepily murmured Sid, but the suggestion bore fruit, as you may learn by reading the next volume of this series, to be called "Rivals of the Ice; A Story of Winter Sports at College." It will tell how, after a strenuous football season, the lads formed an ice league, for skating, hockey playing, and ice-yacht racing.

Outside the college there was singing and the building of bonfires to celebrate the victory of the crew. But in their room, four of the eight-oared victors dozed dreamily on, living over again in fancy that strenuously-fought-out race which they had so labored over. And there, for a time, we will leave them.

THE END

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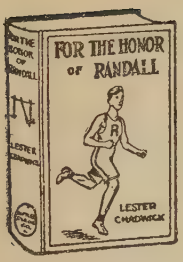

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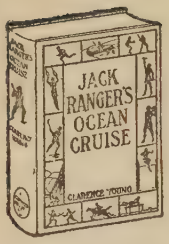

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